

*J. Norton's 1818. — \$0.62½*

# BIOGRAPHICAL SERMONS:

OR A SERIES OF  
DISCOURSES  
ON THE  
PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS  
IN  
SCRIPTURE.

By WILLIAM ENFIELD, LL.D.

Illud honestum quod in alio cernimus nos movet.

CICERO.

---

PRINTED AT BOSTON,

BY THOMAS HALL:

Sold by him, near the Boston Stone, and at other Book-  
Stores in town.

---

MDCCXCIV.



## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Author of these Discourses thinks it necessary to inform his readers, that he means to assume the character of the Biographer, only in subordination to that of the Preacher. Regarding moral instruction as the chief end of preaching, he has with design avoided the discussion of controverted questions ; and without attempting a complete delineation of characters, has selected, from the history of several of the most eminent persons whose actions are recorded in Scripture, such incidents only as appeared to him best adapted to suggest important lessons of morality.

He has adopted this mode of address, not merely on account of its novelty, but from an expectation that the interesting scenes, which it has given him an opportunity of describing, will engage the feeling of his readers in favour of virtue ; and also with a view to lead young persons into a habit of making useful reflections on the actions and characters of men, whether represented in the pages of sacred or civil history, or exhibited in real life.

15 OC 61

## C O N T E N T S.

SERMON.	PAGE.
I. <i>On the character of Abram,</i>	5
II. - - - - <i>Jacob,</i>	27
III,IV. - - - - <i>Joseph,</i>	45,67
V. - - - - <i>Moses,</i>	85
VI. - - - - <i>Job,</i>	103
VII. - - - - <i>David,</i>	121
VIII. - - - - <i>Daniel,</i>	141
IX. - - - - <i>St. Peter,</i>	157
X. - - - - <i>St. Paul,</i>	177
XI,XII. - - <i>Jesus Christ,</i>	193,209

15 OC 61



ON THE  
CHARACTER  
OF  
ABRAHAM.

---

JAMES II. 3.

*He was called the friend of God.*

**T**O enjoy the friendship of wise and good men, is no inconsiderable felicity. It confirms the testimony of our own hearts, and heightens the pleasures of virtuous self approbation : it secures us respect from mankind in general, who always judge of a man's character from the connections which he forms, and the companions with whom he associates : it affords us an opportunity of enjoying the delights of social intercourse in their utmost perfection :

it provides for us an inexhaustible fund of instruction and assistance in circumstances of difficulty : it ministers consolation to our hearts in the time of distress. Such is the power of virtuous friendship among men.

How great, then, must be the happiness which results from enjoying the friendship of that Being, who is the only infallible judge and sure rewarder of merit! How highly honoured was that good man, of whom it is recorded in the text, that “ he was called the friend of God.”

That we may see upon what grounds this appellation was given to Abraham, let us take a view of some of the principal facts which illustrate the virtues of his character : attending, as we proceed, to those useful reflections, which the history of this great patriarch will naturally suggest.

The first appearance which Abraham makes in the scripture history, leads us to revere him as an eminent pattern of religious obedience. We may reasonably suppose, that this good man was no stranger to the tender feelings of natural affection. He had doubtless been united by the strongest ties to his parents, who had been the watchful guar-

dians of his infancy, and the faithful guides of his youth ; and had felt the sweet influences of filial love and gratitude. The several branches which had proceeded from the same stock, partaken of the same nourishment, and flourished under the same culture, with himself, were undoubtedly objects of his most affectionate regard. He could not be a stranger to that fond attachment, which every man feels for the place where he drew his first breath ; where he enjoyed his first pleasures ; where he first beheld the beauties of nature heightened by the charms of novelty ; and where he first sat down to the feast of human life, with all the rapture which the gay imagination and craving appetite of youth could inspire. Imagine, then, the emotions which Abraham felt when he received this command from the Lord : “Get thee out from thy kindred, and from thy farther’s house, to a land which I shall shew thee.

The thought of leaving his kindred and friends behind him, and wandering abroad into a land of strangers, distresses him. Nature binds him by a strong but pleasing chain to the threshold of his father’s house. Interest instructs

him, that he can no-where else be so secure from danger, or enjoy so fair a prospect of success and prosperity. Prejudice paints his native country and his father's house in flattering colours, and casting a shade upon the rest of the world, represents every other place to his imagination as a barren and dreary wilderness. On the other hand, piety teacheth him, that the will of the Almighty ought in the first place to be regarded ; that no prospect of present indulgence, or temporary advantage, should ever tempt him to violate his commands ; that such is the wisdom and goodness of his Maker, that the path of obedience will infallibly prove the path of safety and happiness ; and that, wherever he goes he shall enjoy the presence of his almighty father and friend, and partake of the blessings of his providence. Supported by these sentiments, the pious patriarch conquers the reluctance of nature ; banishes fear from his heart ; suppresses every passion which would prompt him to disobey the heavenly voice ; and resigns himself entirely to the divine direction. “ By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should afterwards receive for an inher-

itance, obeyed ; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Under the influence of the same divine principles let us at all times submit our concerns to the guidance of that Almighty being who is wiser than ourselves ! In all places, and in every condition, esteeming his providence our security and his favour our happiness, let us cheerfully follow whithersoever he shall see fit to conduct us.

The religious principles which Abraham had imbibed in his father's house accompanied him wherever he went ; and when he became " very rich in cattle and silver and gold," secured him against the snares of prosperity.

The power of riches to corrupt the human heart hath often been observed, and often experienced. Instead of uniting us more firmly to the author of all good in the bonds of love and gratitude ---as undoubtedly they ought---how frequently is it seen that they alienate the soul from God, and render us unmindful of his providence, unthankful for his mercies ! Instead of increasing our benevolence, in proportion as they enlarge our opportunities of doing good---as might reasonably be expected---how often do they swell the heart with pride, that un-

social and unfriendly passion, and minister fuel to the flames of contention ! These however are not the necessary consequences of wealth. In the heart which hath been carefully cultivated and improved by the hand of wisdom, it produceth far different effects ; it produceth the fruits of piety towards God, and of goodwill towards men.

Such were its fruits in the heart of Abraham. In the midst of all his abundance, and all the cares and avocations with which it was accompanied, he never forgot the God " who giveth power to get wealth." Wherever he went, " he built an altar to the Lord."

Nor was the benevolence of Abraham in the least degree inferior to his piety. Witness his behaviour to Lot, his brother's son, when a contention arose between them concerning the place of their residence. Wealth, which is the occasion of most of the quarrels that happen in the world, gave rise to the dispute. " The land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together ; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together." The strife began between the herdmen of Abraham's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle.

Pride and ambition are plants which will flourish in any soil ; and those who have nothing of their own to contend about, or value themselves upon, are often seen to derive to themselves an imaginary importance from the wealth and greatness of those on whom they depend. Hence arise many contentions among persons whom, one would think, prudence should teach to alleviate the hardships and burdens of poverty and servitude, by mutual kindness and harmony. And the fire of dissention which is by this or any other means kindled among servants, may soon communicate itself to their masters, and produce the most destructive consequences, unless they have the discretion and resolution to extinguish it at its first appearance.

Had Abraham encouraged the spirit of animosity which was raised between his own servants and those of Lot, and listened to the complaints that were doubtless made to him, it might have occasioned a disaffection and enmity between him and his nephew, which could never have been removed ; it might have exposed them both, to the ridicule and reproach, and the encroachments

and ravages, of the Canaanites and Perizzites, who then dwelt in the land. Abraham had too much wisdom not to foresee, and too much generosity not to be desirous of preventing these consequences. Instead of claiming the right of choice, which seniority and the relation in which he stood to Lot seemed to allow him ; instead of waiting to receive the first proposals of accommodation from Lot, from whom it seemed natural to expect them ; with a degree of civility and politeness which might have done honour to a court ; with a degree of condescension and benevolence which was worthy of the friend of God, he said unto Lot, “ Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee ? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me : if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right ; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.” What beautiful simplicity of expression ! What amiable mildness of disposition, and generosity of sentiment !

Happy, indeed, would it be for the world, if all the sons of discord and

strife would learn of Abraham a lesson of condescension and compliance ! Were mankind more generally governed by the amiable spirit which he discovered in this affair, how much alienation of heart, how many angry looks, hard speeches, and malicious actions, in private life ; how much of the fury of a party spirit, in civil or religious societies ; how many of the contentions which arise between princes, and of those dreadful calamities in which their quarrels involve mankind, might be prevented !

The whole world does not afford room enough for those violent and restless spirits who delight in contention, to pass along, without jostling against their peaceable neighbours, and disturbing their repose. But, the man who possesseth the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, will always be ready to step aside out of his way, either to the right hand or to the left, to suit the convenience or gratify the inclination of his brother. And in the estimation of the generous mind, all mankind are brethren. We are all partakers of the same nature ; offspring of the same Almighty Parent ; fed by the same bountiful hand ;

united in the same general society, and sharers in the same enjoyments and hopes. And shall children of the same family, when they sit down to partake of the plentiful provision which the merciful Father of all hath prepared for them, contend with each other, for the uppermost seat at the feast ; or be dissatisfied with their portion of the entertainment, and envious of the share which falls to another's lot ? Yet thus unnatural and ridiculous are most of the contentions which happen among mankind. Instead of insisting with punctilio exactness, upon every thing which we imagine to be our due, and thinking it a necessary point of honour to adhere in every instance to our right ; let us, then, in cases which do not materially affect our happiness or that of others, be ever ready to recede from our lawful claims, and for the sake of peace to give way to the prejudices and indulge the humours of others.

Another incident in the life of Abraham, which casts new light upon his character, is his behaviour to three strangers, who, as the history informs us, afterwards appeared to be angels. In this transaction he exhibits before us

a most amiable pattern of hospitality. Though he seems to have been at first wholly unacquainted with the dignity of his guests, he treated them with the utmost civility and respect. "When he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground." So naturally doth a kind friendly disposition produce a courteous and obliging deportment.

Though modern times may have carried the forms of good breeding to a degree of refinement unknown in the early ages of the world, true politeness hath its foundation in nature, and is neither inconsistent with pastoral simplicity, strict integrity nor pure religion.

Civility and benevolence are nearly allied, and generally go hand in hand. They did so in the present case. After Abraham had bowed himself to the ground, he said, "If now I have found favour in your sight, pass not away, I pray you, from your servant. Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread; and comfort ye your hearts;

after that ye shall pass on." When he saw them approaching, he did not withdraw himself from their sight, to avoid their company, as churlishness and avarice might have taught him to do : He did not even wait to see whether they would of themselves turn into his tent, and ask relief from the friendly hand of hospitality ; but with that benevolence of heart which makes a man ready to every good work, he went to them, and entreated them to rest and refresh themselves under his roof.

And the liberality and cheerfulness with which he provided for their refreshment, was equal to the courtesy and friendship of his invitation. Though he could not grace his table with those elegancies which the luxury of later ages has invented, his entertainment was not the less plentiful, nor did he give his guests the less hearty welcome. He employed Sarah to "make cakes of three measures of the finest meal ; he ran himself to the herd, and fetched a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, to dress it :" and, when the provision was ready, "he set it before them, and stood by them under the tree, and they did eat."

What a beautiful picture of nature in her simplest attire ! Say, ye sons of luxury and excess, is there a pleasure to be found at your most splendid and costly tables, which Abraham and his guests did not enjoy, at least in equal perfection, at his humble board ? Are ye more happy, when a friend or a stranger sits down to partake of your richest and most luxurious entertainments, than this good man was, when he stood under the tree, and saw the strangers eat of the simple repast which he had set before them ? Is your hospitality greater, is it more free from the tincture of vanity, than was his ? Do your numerous and artificial viands minister higher gratification to your vitiated taste, than the plain and unadulterated food, of nature affords to the craving appetite of the labouring man ? What then have ye gained, by departing from the simple path of nature, and making yourselves the slaves of luxury and fashion ?

The history leads us, in the next place, to consider Abraham in his domestic and relative character : it informs us, that the Lord said concerning Abraham, " I know him, that he will command his children and his household af-

after that ye shall pass on." When he saw them approaching, he did not withdraw himself from their sight, to avoid their company, as churlishness and avarice might have taught him to do : He did not even wait to see whether they would of themselves turn into his tent, and ask relief from the friendly hand of hospitality ; but with that benevolence of heart which makes a man ready to every good work, he went to them, and entreated them to rest and refresh themselves under his roof.

And the liberality and cheerfulness with which he provided for their refreshment, was equal to the courtesy and friendship of his invitation. Though he could not grace his table with those elegancies which the luxury of later ages has invented, his entertainment was not the less plentiful, nor did he give his guests the less hearty welcome. He employed Sarah to "make cakes of three measures of the finest meal ; he ran himself to the herd, and fetched a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, to dress it :" and, when the provision was ready, "he set it before them, and stood by them under the tree, and they did eat."

What a beautiful picture of nature in her simplest attire ! Say, ye sons of luxury and excess, is there a pleasure to be found at your most splendid and costly tables, which Abraham and his guests did not enjoy, at least in equal perfection, at his humble board ? Are ye more happy, when a friend or a stranger sits down to partake of your richest and most luxurious entertainments, than this good man was, when he stood under the tree, and saw the strangers eat of the simple repast which he had set before them ? Is your hospitality greater, is it more free from the tincture of vanity, than was his ? Do your numerous and artificial viands minister higher gratification to your vitiated taste, than the plain and unadulterated food, of nature affords to the craving appetite of the labouring man ? What then have ye gained, by departing from the simple path of nature, and making yourselves the slaves of luxury and fashion ?

The history leads us, in the next place, to consider Abraham in his domestic and relative character : it informs us, that the Lord said concerning Abraham, " I know him, that he will command his children and his household af-

ter him ; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." It was the first object of this good man's concern with regard to his children and domestics, that they should be governed by the principles of true religion, and that they should live in the continual observance of the laws of righteousness. To accomplish this important end, he employed all the influence of his instructions, example and authority.

And herein he discovered his wisdom, and his parental affection, no less than his piety. For religious and virtuous principles are the best legacies which parents can bequeath to their children. Since virtue is the greatest ornament and highest felicity of human nature ; since it is probably the road to health, reputation and prosperity in this world ; since it certainly brings with it the most invaluable blessings, a peaceful conscience, the favour of Almighty God, and the hope of eternal life ; how can parents so judiciously manifest their love to their offspring, as by " training them up in the way in which they should go ?" What compensation will the greatest abundance of riches, the highest honours,

or even the most extensive learning make them, for the want of those religious principles and virtuous habits which are the only true and lasting foundation of happiness ?

By all the nameless sensations of tenderness which ye whom heaven hath blessed with children feel towards them, be entreated, then, to make their improvement in piety and virtue your chief concern. That you should provide as far as you are able for their comfortable support and happy settlement in life, is undoubtedly your duty. Nor is it less your duty to afford them every opportunity in your power for improving their understandings, and laying up stores of useful and ornamental knowledge in their minds. But, let it never be forgotten, that the principal part of education, is the education of the heart. Endeavour by every method in your power, to inspire them with a reverence for the Supreme Being, with gratitude for his innumerable mercies ; with a sense of honour and love of virtue ; with sentiments of generosity and compassion towards their fellow creatures ; with regard to truth ; and with a consciousness of the dignity and ex-

cellence of their rational nature. On this foundation assist them in raising the superstructure of a manly, virtuous and useful character. In a word, imitate the example of the pious patriarch ; and so command your children and household after you, " that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."

The last important event recorded in the sacred history concerning Abraham, is that of his offering up his son Isaac. This action is justly considered as the most illustrious and striking instance of that faith in God, for which he is so often mentioned in scripture with applause, and with reference to which he is particularly pointed out as a proper pattern for our imitation. Let us then examine into the nature of the faith of Abraham ; and enquire on what account it was so highly acceptable to God.

Faith, as it was exercised by this patriarch, must doubtless mean something more than a bare assent to the truths of religion, in conformity to the opinions and in compliance with the examples of others. Such a faith as this, though perhaps the only faith which many possess, is so far from having it in any de-

gree of merit, that it betrays a culpable indolence and servility of temper, and a shameful neglect of the intellectual and rational powers which God hath given us.

Nor can this faith denote merely such a conviction of the understanding as results from deliberate and impartial enquiry. For, though the diligence with which a man searches after truth, and the cheerfulness with which he receives it wherever it is found, have in them, doubtless, some degree of merit ; yet, the opinion, or faith, which is the consequence of such enquiry, cannot be in itself meritorious, since opinions necessarily follow from the perceptions of the understanding. The degree of care and accuracy with which we conduct our enquiries, is in our own power ; but the conclusions we draw, and the judgments we form from them, are not so : These must unavoidably be determined by the apparent weight of evidence, and strength of argument. Opinions, as such, can therefore neither be virtuous nor vicious.

The faith of Abraham, which was imputed to him for righteousness, was an active principle of religion, which in-

cluded in it a rational conviction of the power, wisdom, goodness and faithfulness of the Supreme Being, and which produced a cordial reliance on every divine promise, and a cheerful obedience to every divine command. Hence it was that he received without hesitation the promise of a numerous offspring ; and hence it was that, in the present case, he executed, without complaining, a most trying and painful injunction.

Nor will any thing short of such an active and efficacious principle of religion as Abraham here discovered render us acceptable to God, or be imputed to us for righteousness. If we profess to believe in the providence and government of Almighty God, in the divine authority and character of Jesus Christ, and in the promise of eternal life ; unless our faith leads us to a cordial acquiescence in the divine appointments, to a cheerful observance of the laws of righteousness, and to diligence in our preparation for the life to come, it will profit us nothing.

Agreeable to these sentiments is the language of St. James. “ Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Thou believest that there is one God

thou doest well : the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead ? Was not Abraham our Father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar ? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works ; and by works was faith made perfect ? and the scripture was fulfilled which faith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness ; and he was called the friend of God. Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only ; for, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

7

im  
tic  
op  
fic  
wa  
ne  
wi  
ap  
tex  
to  
our  
en  
net

ON THE  
CHARACTER

o r

J A C O B.

---

GENESIS XXV. 27.

*Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.*

THE character of a plain man, in the usual acceptation of the term, implies honesty and integrity of disposition, and simplicity of manners; directly opposed to every species of disguise, artifice, or duplicity, and approaching towards that openness of temper and rudeness of speech, which are inconsistent with civility and prudence. And the application of this phrase to Jacob in the text, together with the supposed allusion to these words in the testimony which our Saviour bears to Nathaniel, has given this patriarch a reputation for plainness and simplicity of character, which,

as we shall soon learn from the history of his life, he little deserved.

From the contrast which seems intended in the text between the character of Esau and Jacob, and from the view which the history gives us of their respective dispositions and manners, I am inclined to follow the interpretation of a judicious commentator ;\* who understands the word which in our translation is rendered a plain man, as denoting a man of a gentle and quiet temper ; and supposes that the historian meant to characterise Esau as an active, daring and turbulent spirit, fond of the sports and exercises of the field, and Jacob as a meek and peaceable man, who took delight in the tranquil occupations and amusements of pastoral life.

Perhaps persons of mild and gentle dispositions are naturally more inclined than others to study and practise the arts of deceit. Always timid and apprehensive of danger, but averse to an open attack of the enemy, they have recourse to ambuscade and treachery. Having the same ends to accomplish with other men, but wanting resolution to pursue them in a direct and vigorous manner, they call in the aid of cunning and fraud,

\* Vid. Le Clerc in loc.

to supply the place of courage and activity.

This general observation is confirmed by the conduct of Jacob, in two remarkable instances, while he was yet a young man, and dwelt in his father's house.

His brother Esau enjoyed the honour and privilege of seniority. In these times of simplicity, as well as in later ages, several important distinctions belonged to the elder brother as his birth-right. He was entitled to the first blessing from his father, who, before his death, with prophetic solemnity pronounced the future condition of his children ; and he inherited whatever privileges or possessions were entailed on the family. Jacob envied Esau the honour of receiving the first benediction from their father Isaac, and of inheriting the promises made to Abraham. Esau one day returning from the field, fatigued with labour and faint with abstinence, at the instant that Jacob was sitting down to his usual repast, asked permission of his brother to partake with him of the refreshment. Jacob, who was, in the present instance at least, more inclined to make a profitable bar-

gain for himself than to perform an act of generosity to his brother, thinking this a favourable opportunity of extorting from Esau the privilege of his birth-right, refused to comply with his request, on any other condition, than that he should immediately transfer to him, by a solemn oath, all the rights of seniority. Esau was not now in a condition to deliberate upon the equity of the proposal. Nature urged her demands with too much importunity to be denied. He consented ; and probably would have consented, if a kingdom had been the price of his refreshment : for the reasoning by which he satisfied himself would have been in this case equally conclusive ; “ Behold I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birth-right do me ? ”

If Esau was culpable for not setting a higher value on his birth-right ; surely Jacob was not less criminal in thus meanly taking advantage of his situation to force from him a surrender of rights, for which he gave him no equivalent, and which Esau himself, how much soever he might in this moment of trial despise them, afterwards sought with tears to regain.

This is a species of meanness which we often see practised in the world. When necessity compels a man to part with his possessions, how seldom will he find an honourable and generous purchaser ! How many greedy plunderers will flock around him, in hopes of making some advantage of his misfortunes, who to enhance their gains will depreciate the value of his property ; and after having ungenerously enriched themselves by a bargain, to which the sufferer's " poverty and not his will consented," will perhaps have the effrontery to call themselves his benefactors and friends ! The insults of mock friendship, are the heaviest part of the burden of poverty. \*

A similar kind of baseness, but stained with a still deeper die of guilt, is that of leading the inexperienced and incautious youth into the haunts of licentiousness and vice, and tempting him to resign his innocence and peace for the sake of indulging a present inclination. His virtue is his birth-right, for which no momentary pleasure can be an equivalent : Every young man who has not already parted with it, values it above all other treasures. No

young man, I believe I may venture to assert, ever made a deliberate and calm surrender of his virtue. It is only when passion is impetuous and will be obeyed, that innocence is bartered for pleasure. And, therefore, although I blame the youth who, at any time, or for any price, sells this birth-right, I blame *him* much more who leads him into a situation where nothing but the clamours of appetite and passion can be heard, and there tempts him to make the fatal exchange. Can there be a character baser or more dangerous than this? I know of one, and but one; it is that of the man who employs the same arts, to betray the prize, which every man of honour will protect---female virtue.

One base action makes a man still more capable of committing another. After Jacob had extorted the birth-right from his brother, he was prepared to defraud his father of his blessing. He might have claimed it as his due, in virtue of the agreement which he had made with Esau; but whether it was that his heart reproached him for the manner in which the bargain had been made, or whether (which is more probable) he was apprehensive that his

father would not admit the claim ; he thought it proper to decline it, and to make use of indirect and dishonest means, to obtain this end.

In this crime, however, Jacob was only a partner and accomplice ; his mother was the principal agent ; she contrived the fraud, furnished him with the means of deception, and put the lie into his mouth. With such a prompter, it is not at all surprising that the young man acted his part successfully. When parents condescend to become teachers of wickedness, they will generally find their children ready scholars. Example alone is often sufficiently successful in corrupting the manners of youth ; but when precept is added, it may well be expected that they will make a rapid progress, and soon become eminent masters in the arts of iniquity. There are few persons indeed so totally corrupt, both in principle and practice, as to wish to see their children as vicious as themselves ; they generally endeavour, though probably without much hope of success, to counteract the fatal influence of their bad example by good instruction and advice. But, in some cases, a blind and imprudent fondness may,

incline a parent to lead his child into forbidden paths. It was Rebekah's partiality for her son Jacob, and her desire of obtaining for him the first blessing, which tempted her to devise and assist him in executing a scheme of fraud and falsehood to impose upon his father. And it is no uncommon thing to see parents employing base and iniquitous means to enrich their offspring ; and even encouraging them to enter on employments or engage in schemes, which will almost unavoidably lead them to sacrifice their integrity at the shrine of wealth and grandeur. Such parents do the most fatal injury to their children, where they intend them the greatest kindness ; and instead of obtaining for them a blessing, bring them up a curse.

Jacob was easily persuaded by his mother to pass himself upon his father, whose sight was decayed through age, for Esau. And he executed the deception with so much dexterity, that Isaac received him as his first-born, and gave him the blessing. During the process indeed, Isaac entertained some suspicions of unfair proceedings. Jacob and his mother had been so expeditious in providing the repast which Isaac expected

from the hands of his son Esau, that when Jacob brought it to him, he said, "How is it that thou hast found the venison so quickly, my son?" One lie commonly requires another to hide it. Jacob's invention, which was now upon the stretch to save his credit with his father and carry on the imposition, immediately suggested an answer: "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." Isaac did not imagine his son capable of calling upon the great name of the Lord his God in confirmation of a falsehood, and therefore easily yielded to the deception.

In like manner, and generally with the like success, have impostors in all ages concealed their frauds under the cloak of religion, and deceived mankind in the name of the Lord.

Though Jacob was successful in his attempt to impose upon his father, his fraud did not pass wholly unpunished. It kindled in the breast of his brother a flame of resentment which threatened his destruction, and obliged him, for the preservation of his life, to fly from his father's house to a distant country. It is probable that this circumstance, and the reflections which years and experi-

incline a parent to lead his child into forbidden paths. It was Rebekah's partiality for her son Jacob, and her desire of obtaining for him the first blessing, which tempted her to devise and assist him in executing a scheme of fraud and falsehood to impose upon his father. And it is no uncommon thing to see parents employing base and iniquitous means to enrich their offspring ; and even encouraging them to enter on employments or engage in schemes, which will almost unavoidably lead them to sacrifice their integrity at the shrine of wealth and grandeur. Such parents do the most fatal injury to their children, wherethey intend them the greatest kindness ; and instead of obtaining for them a blessing, bring them up a curse.

Jacob was easily persuaded by his mother to pass himself upon his father, whose sight was decayed through age, for Esau. And he executed the deception with so much dexterity, that Isaac received him as his first-born, and gave him the blessing. During the process indeed, Isaac entertained some suspicions of unfair proceedings. Jacob and his mother had been so expeditious in providing the repast which Isaac expected

from the hands of his son Esau, that when Jacob brought it to him, he said, "How is it that thou hast found the venison so quickly, my son?" One lie commonly requires another to hide it. Jacob's invention, which was now upon the stretch to save his credit with his father and carry on the imposition, immediately suggested an answer: "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." Isaac did not imagine his son capable of calling upon the great name of the Lord his God in confirmation of a falsehood, and therefore easily yielded to the deception.

In like manner, and generally with the like success, have impostors in all ages concealed their frauds under the cloak of religion, and deceived mankind in the name of the Lord.

Though Jacob was successful in his attempt to impose upon his father, his fraud did not pass wholly unpunished. It kindled in the breast of his brother a flame of resentment which threatened his destruction, and obliged him, for the preservation of his life, to fly from his father's house to a distant country. It is probable that this circumstance, and the reflections which years and experi-

ence suggested, wrought a change in his disposition and manners; for through the remainder of his life we find few actions which deserve censure, and many traits in his character worthy of respect and imitation.

When Jacob arrived at the house of his uncle Laban, he met with a friendly and affectionate reception, which doubtless, at his inexperienced and unsuspecting age, passed for a sure presage of happiness in his new settlement. But he soon found that avarice was the reigning passion in his uncle's heart, and suffered repeated injuries and oppressions from this quarter. Having served seven years for Rachel (which seemed to him but a few days for the love he had to her) Lebanon gave him his elder daughter and obliged him to serve another seven years before he would fulfil the agreement. And after this he distressed and harrassed him till at length Jacob was compelled to leave this state of bondage and seek a new habitation.

The hardships he suffered, and particularly the disappointments he met with here, though they might perhaps be a proper punishment for the frauds he had practised when young in his fath-

er's house, were by no means an equitable return for his fidelity and affection to the house of Laban ; and one cannot help sympathising with him under his severe treatment ; and rejoicing to find that, notwithstanding all the unkindness and oppression of his uncle, his industry and faithfulness were so far rewarded by heaven, that, upon crossing the river Jordan on his return home, he could say, "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands."

An interval of twenty years having now passed since his brother Esau's enmity against him commenced ; Jacob formed the laudable purpose of attempting to regain his friendship. His conscience instructed him that, as his own conduct had occasioned the separation, the first step towards agreement ought to be on his part. And his humility and remaining affection for his brother rendered this no difficult task. Accordingly he sent messengers to Esau to inform him of his welfare, and solicit a reconciliation. But when they returned and told him that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men, he was greatly alarmed lest his brother

should still meditate revenge, and prepared to appease his anger by valuable presents. His fears, however, were soon removed : and seeing Esau and his train approaching, he disposed his family and attendants in their proper order, and went out to meet him. When they came near to each other, Jacob paid his brother the most expressive marks of respect, bowing himself several times to the ground.

Esau, overcome by this submissive behaviour, and by the pleasure of seeing a brother who was born and educated with him after so long an absence, ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him. Resentment could now find no place in his breast ; for it was wholly possessed and powerfully agitated by the milder and more pleasing passions of tenderness, love, and joy. Jacob was no less transported with pleasure, to meet with such tender affection from the man from whom he had just before expected nothing but rage and destruction ; to embrace a brother whose face he dreaded to behold ; and to find that union of hearts, which nature had established between them, but which his own treach-

ery had destroyed, so happily and unexpectedly restored. Both felt emotions of joy which nothing but tears could express---both wept.

After the first transports of their passion were over, Esau made enquiry concerning Jacob's family and the servants and cattle which attended him ; and received this answer : " These are to find grace in the sight of my Lord." Esau generously and politely declined accepting the present, saying, " I have enough, my brother, keep that thou hast unto thyself." At last, however, Jacob's repeated entreaties prevailed, and he accepted the tokens of his friendship. And when they had taken an affectionate leave of each other, they pursued their respective journeys.

Where shall we find a more instructive example of the efficacy of a mild and submissive behaviour to conquer the most vehement or inveterate resentment ; or a better illustration of the maxim of Solomon, " A soft answer turneth away wrath ?" Let the behaviour of Jacob teach those haughty spirits, who cannot stoop to acknowledge the offence they have stooped to commit, a lesson of submission. And let those men of hon-

our, who think it beneath them to pardon the smallest affront without receiving what is falsely called satisfaction, learn from the behaviour of Esau, that "it is a glory to a man to pass by a transgression."

After this scene, we find Jacob, with his family and possessions, settled in the land of Canaan, probably in full expectation that his calamities would now be at an end, and that he should pass the remainder of his days in tranquility. But trouble soon found its way to his new habitation. His children, who ought to have been the support of his declining age, pierced his heart with many sorrows. His daughter fell a prey to the lawless passion of a neighbouring prince. His sons, to revenge the affront, were guilty of the basest treachery and the most deliberate barbarity. His beloved wife was taken from him in circumstances which would doubtless greatly aggravate the loss. His favourite son was, as he supposed, torn in pieces by wild beasts, but in reality sold by his envious brethren into Egypt. A grievous famine obliged him to send his children a long and hazardous journey into Egypt to buy corn. And, to close the

long catalogue of his misfortunes in the land of Canaan, the governor in Egypt treated his sons as spies, kept Simeon as a hostage for their return, and refused to give them a second supply unless they would bring up their younger brother into Egypt ; which extorted from the fond and afflicted heart of the patriarch this bitter lamentation ; “ Me ye have bereaved of my children ; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away : all these things are against me.” No wonder that when Jacob arrived at the end of his journey, and looked back upon the path he had trodden, he said, “ Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.”

His sun, however, did not set behind a cloud. The evening of his life was serene and pleasant. His beloved Joseph, for whom he had shed many a bitter tear, was now, by a series of surprising events, raised to the second place in the government of Egypt. The delightful discovery burst upon his aged heart with a torrent of joy which in a moment repaid him for months and years of sorrow. “ It is enough,” says he “ Joseph my son is yet alive : I will go

and see him before I die." He went up into Egypt ; he saw his son ; and dwelt near him in the land of Goshen.

Nothing now remained for this pious patriarch, but to recommend his offspring to the blessing of heaven, and to go down to the sepulchre of his father in peace. Finding that "the time drew nigh that he must die," he summoned his children around him, and took his last solemn farewell of them. Having affectionately embraced them, he poured forth the fulness of his heart in prophetic blessings. Concerning the sons of Joseph he said, " God before whom my father Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God who fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel who redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." On each of his own children he pronounced a distinct benediction. To them all he said, " Behold I die, but God shall be with you." Looking up to the God in whom he trusted, he cried, " I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord : and having made an end of speaking, he yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people."

With what venerable honours is the dying bed of pious age surrounded ! Can

you behold a good man thus calmly laying down the load of life, bidding a decent adieu to the world, and retiring with graceful composure to the chambers of the dead, and not say, "O death where is thy sting?"

107 A. 1

and virtuous men have a bloddy  
and contumacious hearte to oblige  
the people to do what they  
will. And if you will  
not let them have their  
way, then you will be  
a tyrant.

107 A. 1

N

T  
and  
can  
ffo  
ult  
erfe  
ur a  
of

ON THE  
CHARACTER  
OF  
J O S E P H.

---

GENESIS XXXVII. 3, 4.

*Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colours : and when his brethren saw that his father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and would not speak peaceably unto him.*

THE intrinsic moral worth of any character is entirely distinct from, and independent of, external circumstances. Every situation in human life affords sufficient opportunities for the cultivation of virtuous habits, and the performance of good actions ; and as far as a man's virtues respect himself, it is of little consequence, whether they

be displayed to public view from an exalted station, or concealed from the notice of the world in the humble retreats of poverty. If the pine or the oak happen to grow in the valley, the one is not on that account, in itself, the less lofty, nor the other the less majestic.

With respect, however, to the impressions which the virtues of one man make upon the imagination or feeling of another, or the degree of force with which his example will operate, much depends upon the situation in which they appear, and the light in which they are exhibited. In the still walks of domestic life, and under the lowly roof where honest labour dwells, if you will be at the pains to search for them, you will find many amiable and respectable characters, adorned and enriched with virtues which entitle them to a place among “the excellent of the earth,” who, nevertheless, live unnoticed and forgotten ; without reward, without praise, perhaps almost without support : while others, whom fortune hath surrounded with the glare of earthly grandeur, continually set forth their whole stock of shining qualities before the gazing multitude, and are sure of obtaining at

least as much admiration and applause as they deserve.

“ Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.”

Perhaps we owe it to the extraordinary revolutions which happened in the life of Joseph (whose character and history we are now to consider) and to the elevated station which he filled in the court of Pharaoh, that the virtues of his early years, while he was a shepherd in the land of Canaan, a servant to Potiphar, and a prisoner in Egypt, were not buried in oblivion.

Under the former of these characters, the sacred history presents him to us, as at once a proper object of our admiration and pity. While we admire the gentleness of his dispositions, the innocence of his character, and the simplicity of his manners, we cannot but lament his misfortune, and be afflicted to see him fall a sacrifice to the imprudent partiality of his father, and the envy and malice of his brethren.

“ Israel loved Joseph more than all his children :” And why ? Was it because he took better care of the flocks and herds ; because he was more dutiful

and affectionate to his father ; or because he had a better understanding or more amiable dispositions than his brethren ? All this might possibly be true ; and out of any of these particulars a fond parent might have framed a plausible excuse for partiality : and perhaps, had Jacob been asked the reason of his, he might have so flattered and deceived himself, as to have imputed it to some one of these causes : for, when men wish to excuse their actions to themselves or others, nothing is more common than to ascribe them to a good motive instead of the true one. But faithful history hath recorded the real ground of Jacob's partiality, " he loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age."

For no better reason than this, how often do we see parents indulging a partial fondness for some of their offspring, which in proportion as it prevails, alienates their hearts from the rest. Some casual circumstance attending the birth of a child, a fortunate set of features or complexion, a striking resemblance of themselves, or of some absent or deceased friend, or perhaps some incident still more trifling, shall take such

a powerful hold upon their affections, that they shall not be able to deny themselves the gratification of distinguishing the object of their partiality by a thousand enviable tokens of peculiar regard. Such distinctions, even when they are meant as rewards of real merit, ought to be conferred with caution and prudence; lest, while encouragement is given to the more worthy, the inactive and timid should be disheartened, or the bold and aspiring disgusted; and lest envy and malevolence should be raised by those measures which were intended to excite a generous emulation. But when the ground of the distinction is slight and fanciful, the effect must necessarily be injurious, both with respect to the parents and the children. It is of no consequence in what particular manner this partiality is expressed. Whether the favourite be oftener exempted from punishment for his faults, excused from troublesome labours, indulged in the gratification of his fancies, or honoured with kind words and gracious looks; or whether he be raised above the rest by the plan of his education, his destination in life, his present appointments, or

and affectionate to his father ; or because he had a better understanding or more amiable dispositions than his brethren ? All this might possibly be true ; and out of any of these particulars a fond parent might have framed a plausible excuse for partiality : and perhaps, had Jacob been asked the reason of his, he might have so flattered and deceived himself, as to have imputed it to some one of these causes : for, when men wish to excuse their actions to themselves or others, nothing is more common than to ascribe them to a good motive instead of the true one. But faithful history hath recorded the real ground of Jacob's partiality, " he loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age."

For no better reason than this, how often do we see parents indulging a partial fondness for some of their offspring, which in proportion as it prevails, alienates their hearts from the rest. Some casual circumstance attending the birth of a child, a fortunate set of features or complexion, a striking resemblance of themselves, or of some absent or deceased friend, or perhaps some incident still more trifling, shall take such

powerful hold upon their affections, that they shall not be able to deny themselves the gratification of distinguishing the object of their partiality by a thousand enviable tokens of peculiar regard. Such distinctions, even when they are meant as rewards of real merit, ought to be conferred with caution and prudence; lest, while encouragement is given to the more worthy, the inactive and timid should be disheartened, or the bold and aspiring disgusted; and lest envy and malevolence should be raised by those measures which were intended to excite a generous emulation. But when the ground of the distinction is slight and fanciful, the effect must necessarily be injurious, both with respect to the parents and the children. It is of no consequence in what particular manner this partiality is expressed. Whether the favourite be oftener exempted from punishment for his faults, excused from tasksome labours, indulged in the gratification of his fancies, or honoured with kind words and gracious looks; or whether he be raised above the rest by the plan of his education, his destination in life, his present appointments, or

the provision which is made for him in future ; whatever be the peculiar badge or distinction, it is “a coat of many colours,” which at once exposes the fond parent, who puts it on, to ridicule and censure, and the young man who wears it to envy and hatred.

This was experienced most sensibly both by the father and son in the story now under consideration. Jacob had the mortification to see, that his ill-judged partiality for one of his children deprived him of the cordial affection and esteem of the rest ; and soon found that it laid him open to the most unkind and cruel treatment. Joseph felt that the elevation which a parent’s fondness had given him above his brethren, instead of engaging their respect, had only drawn upon him their ridicule, contempt and resentment. They thought it hard and unjust that, in a numerous family, one child should engross the affections of the common parent ; that the streams which were designed by nature to water all the country round, should be confined to one channel, and flow in one direction alone. Their pride could not brook the mortifying idea, that a brother, over whom nature had given them the advan-

tage of seniority, and whom, in all other respects, she had placed on a level with themselves, should be raised above them by the caprice or dotage of their father. The resentment which his partiality excited, at first expressed itself in contemptuous and reproachful language ; “ They hated Joseph, and could not speak peaceably unto him.” It was still farther heightened by the recital of certain dreams, which foretold his future greatness. At length it settled into cool malice, and produced a deliberate purpose of revenge.

Having left their father’s house, and, according to the custom of the times, taken up an occasional residence in a neighbouring country which afforded pasture for their flocks ; Jacob, who still retained his parental affection for his absent sons, and probably in a much stronger degree than their jealousy had permitted them to suppose, grew anxious concerning them, and sent out his son Joseph to enquire after their welfare. “ Go, I pray thee, says he, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks, and bring me word again.” The young man cheerfully undertook the embassy, and executed it faithfully. He

had not learned from his brethren to banish natural affection from his heart. When he found that they had left the place to which his father had directed him, he did not, careless about the success of his undertaking, return home without farther search ; but, making diligent enquiry, he discovered their present abode, and hastened towards them.

When he came within sight of their tents, how different the emotions which arose in the breast of Joseph, and in that of his brethren ! On his part were no feelings but those of affection ; no purposes but those of kindness. Having been for some time separated from them, his remembrance of their former alienation was obliterated ; or, however, the expectation of a happy interview awakened every tender sentiment in his heart, and left no room for the intrusion of unpleasing ideas. As he drew near he rejoiced to behold their prosperity, and hoped to increase their happiness by bringing them good tidings of their father. But, on his approach, a very different train of ideas rushed into their minds ; far other passions rose up in their breasts : all their former resentments and jealousies were in a moment

rekindled : at the first sight of him they exclaimed---not, " see our brother ! " but, " Behold, this dreamer cometh ! "

A design was instantly formed to kill him, and to conceal their crime by saying that he had been devoured by some wild beast ; and, had they been all equally bent upon his destruction, the design had been immediately executed. But, the elder brother Reuben, under the pretence of avoiding the horror of polluting their hands with their brother's blood, but in reality that he might afterwards contrive some means for Joseph's escape, proposed that they should cast him into a neighbouring pit, and there leave him to perish. This proposal being acceded to, the young man, immediately upon his arrival, instead of being welcomed and embraced as a brother, or even saluted as a stranger, was seized and stripped of his raiment ; that coat of many colours, which had been so long the badge of his father's fondness, and the object of their envy ; and, after many cruel insults was thrown into the pit. All his entreaties, all his cries and tears, were ineffectual to obtain his release.

Malice is inexorable : before her tribunal natural affection and humanity intercede in vain ; she even teaches the heart to exult in misery, and to enjoy the horrors which her bloody hands have prepared. The brethren of Joseph were not only instigated by their jealousy and resentment to expose his life : but, while his piteous cries were yet sounding in their ears, they proceeded to partake of their wonted repast, as if nothing had happened to disturb their tranquillity.

" They took him and cast him into a pit ; and they sat down to eat bread." Such enormous crimes do envy and malice, when they have been long suffered to lie rankling in the heart, and are allowed to gain daily strength by being indulged, at length render men capable of committing. How carefully, my brethren, ought we to guard against the slightest venom of such deadly poison !

At this distressful moment, providence brought that relief to Joseph which his brethren had denied him. A company of Ishmaelites passing by on their way to Egypt, it occurred to one of the company, that they might effectually rid themselves of this troublesome and aspiring youth, without shedding his blood,

by selling him to these travellers. There is in human nature such an abhorrence of murder, that even the greatest villains will, if possible, accomplish their ends without it, and will seldom commit this horrid crime from the mere wantonness of barbarity. It was therefore natural, at the approach of these Ishmaelites, that Judah should say to his brethren, " what profit is it, if we slay our brother and conceal his blood ? come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh ;" and that his brethren should be satisfied with the proposal. Had they indeed rightly understood the principle which Judah suggested, and pursued it into its natural consequences, they would have seen, that to sell their brother as a slave was a crime scarcely less heinous in its nature, than that which they first proposed to commit : but, probably, the frequency of the practice of purchasing and selling slaves might, in those days, as it does at present, render men inattentive to the moral nature of the action ; and they might think it a small crime to buy or sell a brother. However this was, it was determined that Joseph should be sold : the Ishmaelites accordingly

purchased him, and carried him into Egypt.

Reuben, who was absent when the bargain was made (having probably withdrawn himself with a view to rescue his brother as soon as the rest of the company had left the pit) upon his return, expressed the utmost distress at the loss of Joseph ; perhaps imagining that during his absence they had dispatched him. The whole affair, however, being explained to him, he acquiesced in what had been done, and they agreed to conceal the action from their father, by dipping the coat of many colours in blood, and thus leading him to conclude that some wild beast had torn his son to pieces. The artifice succeeded ; and, by the help of that concealment and dissimulation which villainy is generally obliged to practise in order to carry on its designs, they persuaded their father that Joseph, his beloved son, was dead. In devising and executing this deception, they might probably intend to take some revenge upon their father for his unreasonable partiality in favour of the child of his old age. But, whatever was their intention, it is most certain that he paid dear for this instance of weakness ; con-

tinuing for a long season to mourn for his son, with unabating and inconsolable grief : “ He refused to be comforted, and said, I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.” This whole story teacheth us the folly of parental partiality, more feelingly than the most laboured reasonings of philosophy could have done ; and ought to be a warning to all parents, not to distinguish one child from the rest by “ a coat of many colours.”

Let us now follow Joseph into Egypt, and observe the virtues which rendered him beloved and respected even in the humble state of servitude, and gradually prepared the way for his advancement.

Having been purchased from the Ishmaelites by Potiphar, an officer in Pharaoh’s guards, his amiable manners soon attracted his master’s notice, and gained him the station of a menial servant in Potiphar’s family. Here he experienced the value of those virtuous and religious principles, which had been early sown, and had taken deep root, in his heart. From his father’s house he had brought treasures, which, even in a state of slavery, he could call his own, and which procured for him, what gold and silver

could not have purchased, the favour of heaven. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." The fidelity with which he constantly discharged his duty, and the attention which he always discovered to his master's interest, obtained, by degrees, such a share of his esteem, that at last he promoted him to offices of the highest honour in his family, and placed an unlimited confidence in his judgment and integrity, entrusted him with the sole management of his domestic affairs. "He made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand ; and he knew not aught he had save the bread which he did eat." And, that he had no reason to repent of his confidence in this upright youth, the sequel sufficiently shows.

This part of the story affords servants a striking pattern for their imitation ; and may instruct them, that a diligent performance of the duties of their station, a faithful regard to the interests of those whom they serve, and such a steady principle of honesty, as no expectation of gain, or certainty of concealment, can overcome, are qualities which will always entitle them to respect, and generally render their situation easy and

advantageous. More particularly, it may encourage such as, through disappointment or misfortune, have been obliged to exchange a state of affluence and independence for that of servitude, to hope, that by a steady course of upright behaviour they may at length rise superior to their difficulties. And lastly, it should teach masters to pay attention to the moral conduct of their servants, and to distinguish such as discover an uncommon share of merit by peculiar and substantial tokens of regard.

The next part of Joseph's history exhibits him in a light which reflects immortal honour upon his memory, and is full of the most important and useful instruction. To the licentious part of the world, a young man resisting the solicitations of beauty may appear an object of ridicule; and many, who would not refuse to pay the tribute of praise which is due to such virtue, may perhaps, through excessive refinement, imagine that it might more properly be an object of private admiration, than be made a topic of public declamation and panegyric. But a character which is intrinsically respectable and highly meritorious, cannot be made ridiculous by

the scorn and laughter of fools, and ought not to be concealed from public view to humour the scruples of false delicacy.

Behold, then, and admire the virtue of this young man ! Assaulted by every temptation which could be supposed capable of seducing him ; enticed by the powerful attractions of beauty, and by repeated and importunate solicitations ; allured by the prospect of gain from the favour and interest of his seducer ; impelled by the fear of her resentment ; see him resolutely withstand all these motives, and in opposition to their combined force preserving his virtue uncorrupted. What were the principles which enabled him to gain this glorious conquest, which raised him superior to the allurements of pleasure and interest, and inspired him with resolution to meet the disdain of mortified pride and disappointed passion ? Was it natural insensibility ? or was it that affectation of indifference to pleasure which later times have termed Stoicism ? No ! The principles which actuated this virtuous youth were of a much more exalted and generous kind : they were honour, gratitude, religion. He disdained to prove

himself unworthy of the confidence his master had placed in him, by basely invading one of his most sacred rights : he was too sensible of the obligations which his master's kindness had laid upon him, to be capable of requiting it by giving a fatal wound to his peace, and robbing him of the only treasure, which he had kept from him : he had too much reverence for the authority of the Supreme Judge, to venture upon so essential a violation of the great laws of justice and equity : he therefore repelled the solicitations of his seducer by saying, " Behold, my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand ; there is none greater in this house than I ; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife : how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ? "

Can we, my brethren, conceive a character more truly respectable, and worthy of imitation, than that which is here presented to our view ? What are the principal qualities in moral actions, from which we determine their value, and the degree of respect which they

deserve ? Are they not chiefly these two, the design with which they are performed, and the vigour and strength of mind which is exerted in performing them ? If a man acts from the most elevated views, and pursues the noblest ends with a steadiness and firmness of resolution which nothing can shake, our moral feelings lead us to pronounce him in the highest degree worthy of respect. Such was the character of Joseph.

Examined by this test, what share of respect will be due to the characters of those, who, while they boast of their honour and courage, accustom themselves to ridicule and despise such virtue as that of Joseph's ? Is it not their avowed principle, that pleasure, in their sense of the term, is the supreme good, and that every thing else ought to be pursued only in subordination to this great object ; that is, in other words, that every man should at all events procure for himself the highest degree of animal gratification in his power, how much soever it may interfere with the happiness of others, the obligations of religion, or even the superior interests of his own nature. These men can therefore certainly have no claim to respect, on account of their

principles and motives of action. Nor are they more respectable for the vigour and firmness of their minds : for their whole life is nothing more than a continued course of weak compliances with the impulses of appetite ; by which their powers are gradually enervated, till at length they become incapable of those mental exertions which higher pursuits would require.

Let us not, then, suffer ourselves to be seduced by false appearances, or the influence of custom, into an opinion that there is any thing worthy of admiration or respect in the character of a man of pleasure, or any thing deserving of ridicule or contempt in that of a man of virtue. If we judge of actions by their motives and tendencies, we must see, that to invade the property of another, or destroy his happiness, is as much a violation of the laws of morality and religion, when the immediate end is to procure ourselves pleasure, as when it is to put ourselves in possession of wealth ; and consequently that the man who invades his neighbour's bed, or who by the arts of seduction despoils a female mind of its virtue, and a female character of its reputation, is at least equally

criminal, with the man who preys upon the public by the arts of fraud, or lives by theft and plunder. On the other hand, it will be evident, that, to resist a temptation to criminal indulgence, that is, to such indulgence as involves in it an injurious attack upon the property or happiness of others, is not less laudable, than to decline opportunities of acquiring wealth by iniquitous means. Licentious pursuits are not the less criminal, because they assume the soft appellation of pleasure ; nor is steady virtue the less respectable, because it is sometimes stigmatised by the name of prisenefs.

Let us then abstain from licentious pleasure with determined resolution, regardless of the contempt which its deluded votaries may cast upon us ; and let us adhere to the path of virtue as the only road to real respect and substantial honour. Nor let us entertain the most distant suspicion that virtue shall ever go without its reward. If in any particular instances it should subject us to ridicule and reproach : if, through the malice of those whom our virtue has offended, it should for a time involve us in difficulties ; let us not despont.

Though Joseph was cast into prison by the artifices and falsehoods of his disappointed and enraged seducer, through the prison (as the sequel will shew) lay the road to his future advancement. And the general tendencies of things, as well as the doctrine of revelation, authorise us to say, “ Verily there is a reward for the righteous ; there is a God who judgeth the earth.”

An  
a  
f  
so  
d

cond  
the  
judg  
medi  
to co  
havin  
issues  
of the  
takl p

---

ON THE  
CHARACTER  
•  
J O S E P H.

---

GENESIS XLV. 4, 5.

*And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt: now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life.*

THE principal reason why men are so frequently dissatisfied with their condition, and disposed to complain of the ways of providence, is, that they judge from present appearances and immediate effects, without being at the pains to consider the remoter tendencies, or having the patience to wait for the final issues of events. If storms arise, or any of the more terrible operations of nature take place, the merchant whose property

sinks beneath the troubled waves, or the husbandman, the produce of whose field is consumed by the fires of heaven, murmurs at his ill fortune, and thinks it hard that industry should be unable to command success. Under the anguish of acute diseases the restless sufferer, alike unmindful of past enjoyments and future prospects, and judging of the condition of human nature wholly from his present feelings, pronounces life a grievous burden, and wishes for leave to lay it down. The sudden loss of some valued possession or some beloved friend, or a disappointment in the execution of some favourite scheme, shall spread such a gloom over every object around us, that we shall become incapable of relishing the blessings which yet remain, and shall be ready in the fretfulness of despondency to adopt the language of Jacob, " All these things are against me."

Whereas, if we would suffer ourselves to view the events which befall us in the calm light of philosophy and religion, we should soon be convinced, that the most dreadful appearances in the natural world, are a necessary part of ~~the~~ a general plan, by which the order and beauty of the universe are preserved; that

some degree of suffering is requisite to give us a higher relish of happiness ; and that our best affections and noblest virtues are cultivated and strengthened in the school of adversity. If we consult our own experience, or observe that of others, we shall find that events which had at first the most unfavourable aspect, and seemed to give just occasion for discontent and complaint, have in the issue been productive of most important advantages. That which happened in the history of Joseph is by no means so unusual, as the gloomy philosopher or the disappointed man of the world may imagine, that “ what we think to be evil, God means for good.”

It was from such just and enlarged views of nature and providence, and from a consciousness of his innocence and integrity, that Joseph derived his chief support, while he was confined in the king’s prison in Egypt. He had the satisfaction to reflect, that neither in the land of Canaan, nor in the house of Potiphar, had he committed any offence which merited the treatment he had received : he therefore hoped, that the Almighty Guardian of innocence would at length rescue him out of the hands

of his oppressors. Being in the same prison with one of the king's servants who was soon to be released, he hoped to be able through his interest to obtain his enlargement : he therefore said to him, " Think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness I pray thee unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house ; for indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." Reasonable, however, as Joseph's request was, and notwithstanding all the kindness he had shewn to the king's servant in prison, he had the mortification to find, that upon his advancement he no longer remembered the afflictions of his fellow prisoner : " Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him."

Deserted by all the world, Joseph had now no resource but in the God of his fathers. In him he still cheerfully confided ; and he soon found, that " it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." The supernatural power of interpreting dreams with which he was endued, and which he had discovered in prison, introduced him to the

presence and notice of Pharaoh : and on account of the extraordinary sagacity which he displayed, he was on a sudden raised from the disgraceful abode of mal-efactors to the first place of honour and trust under Pharaoh. Thus in one prosperous moment all his afflictions were ended, and his virtues received an ample reward.

The same virtues which had guided and supported this young man while he was in the humble condition of a shepherd and a servant, adorned and elevated his character when he was called to fill a superior station in the court of Egypt, and to act as prime minister to the absolute monarch of an extensive empire.

But, waving the consideration of his actions as a statesman, as less adapted to suggest moral instruction, let us view him in the relations of a brother and a son, and follow him through the interesting and pathetic scenes which the remaining part of his history exhibits.

The famine which Joseph had foretold reaching the country in which Jacob dwelt, and the wise precautions which the king of Egypt had taken to prevent its destructive effects having been reported abroad, Jacob determined to send his

sons into Egypt to buy corn. On this errand all, except Benjamin, went up to the court of Pharaoh. They soon gained access to the prime minister, who himself superintended the sale of corn from the public granaries. The appearance of Zaph-Nath-Paaneah, the principal officer under the king of Egypt, was so entirely different from that of the afflicted and injured youth whom they had sold to the Ishmaelites, that it was impossible for them to discover that the person was the same.

Joseph, at the instant that he saw his brethren before him, observing that he was unknown to them, resolved to keep them for a while in ignorance, that he might have an opportunity of discovering their present dispositions, and particularly of trying the strength of their affection for their father and their brethren. To carry on this design, he assumed a sternness of aspect, and severity of language, that ill accorded with the tender emotions which this interview had occasioned. He reproached them with coming into Egypt as spies, and required that before they should be permitted to carry a second supply of corn into Canaan, they should prove the truth

of the account which they had given of themselves, by bringing up their younger brother along with them, and in the mean time should leave one of their number bound in prison as a pledge for their return.

This demand, which included in it so many afflicting circumstances, involved them in the utmost perplexity and distress. In the hour of calamity, it is natural for the guilty to upbraid themselves, and ascribe their sufferings to their crimes. The horrid plot which they had formerly devised against their brother's life, and their cruelty in turning a deaf ear to his cries, and abandoning him to all the wretchedness of slavery, now rose up before their imaginations in their true colours. Their consciences accused them ; and they said one to another, in their own language ; " We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear, therefore is this distress come upon us." Joseph was so touched with this scene that he was obliged to turn aside and weep. Determined however, to execute his design, he soon re-

fumed his counterfeited severity, and persisted in requiring them to bring up their younger brother.

When Jacob heard the hard conditions on which they were to expect the continuance of the necessary supplies of food, he was beyond measure afflicted, and refused to comply. At length, however, finding that no other resource remained, he consented, and with a heart full of grief said, " If it must be so now, take your brother, and arise, go again unto the man ; and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin : if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

On their second arrival in Egypt, the governor finding they had obeyed his orders, received them with great kindness, and so far indulged the natural feelings of his heart as to enquire affectionately concerning their father, and give the young stranger a cordial welcome. " He asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well ? the old man of whom ye spake, is he yet alive ? And they answered, thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive ; and they bowed down their heads, and made obe-

sance." And seeing Benjamin his mother's son, he said, " Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me ? and he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son." The scene now became too interesting to be supported without the natural relief of tears : that he might not therefore prevent the complete execution of his purpose by a premature discovery, he retired into his chamber and wept there.

After having received several tokens of kindness from the governor, they set out with fresh supplies of corn on their journey homewards : but Joseph, who now became impatient to discover himself to his brethren, made use of an artifice to recal them, and to give him an opportunity of revealing the important secret. Having ordered the silver cup out of which he drank to be privately conveyed into Benjamin's sack of corn, he called them back, charged them with the theft, and required that the person in whose sack it should be found should be his servant. When the cup was found with Benjamin, all his brethren were exceedingly afflicted for ther father ; and Judah, in a most pathetic speech, acquainted the governor with all the par-

ticulars of the case, and entreated that he himself might be permitted to remain a bondman instead of Benjamin.

Joseph was now sufficiently convinced that his brethren retained a dutiful and affectionate regard for their father, that mutual harmony subsisted among themselves, and that they sincerely repented of their former behaviour towards him. It was enough : his generous heart desired no more. Unwilling to give them pain for a single moment longer than was necessary to discover their present dispositions ; unable, after what had passed, to disguise his feelings, and suppress the strong emotions that struggled within him ; commanding the attendants to withdraw, a flood of tears burst from his eyes, and he said unto his brethren, " I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live ? And his brethren could not answer him. And Joseph said unto his brethren, come near to me I pray you ; and they came near ; and he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt : now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither ; for God did send me before you to preserve life."

Before we proceed with the narra-

tive, let us pause to admire the tender, generous and noble spirit which Joseph discovered through the whole of this interesting scene. His sudden and extraordinary advancement had not so far elated his spirit, as to render him capable of looking down with contempt upon his brethren ; absence had not worn out the impressions, which natural relations and early connections had made ; nor had even the malicious barbarity of his brethren, in that scene of his life which was too distressful ever to be forgotten, been able to tear asunder the bonds of nature. Though they had injured him beyond reparation ; though he had suffered such indignities and cruelties as might have been sufficient to have justified the warmest resentment ; he still remembered that the persons who had treated him in this manner were his brethren ; he still felt the powerful attractions of natural affection ; and, finding them disposed to receive, and capable of enjoying, his friendship, he used his utmost endeavours to establish a mutual and lasting attachment. He did not satisfy himself with coldly assuring them that he had forgiven them ; he restored

them to a place in his heart, treated them with every external mark of kindness, and continued, through the remainder of his life, to render them the most important and generous services.

Such generosity as this, it is much easier to admire than to imitate. When we are called upon to make the application, and to exhibit in our own conduct similar examples of a forgiving temper, we are too apt to imagine that there is some essential peculiarities in our circumstances, which may serve as a reasonable apology for indulging our resentments. Though the injury we have suffered may bear no proportion to that which Joseph knew how to forgive ; though no attempt has been made upon our life, our liberty, or our property ; though perhaps the offence that has been committed amounts to nothing more than an angry word, a censorious reflection, a bold contradiction of our opinion, or merely a violation of the rules of good-breeding and politeness ; yet we find means to persuade ourselves that the culprit has no claim to forgiveness, and that to persist in our resentment against him is innocent and even laudable. The true reason of this is, that we do not in-

reality possess so much of the genuine spirit of benevolence and piety as we may perhaps persuade others, and ourselves, to imagine. How much soever men may declaim on the excellence of charity, and boast of their philanthropy, they are in reality destitute of this divine principle, if it hath not taught them the lessons of forbearance and forgiveness ; “ for charity suffereth long, is not easily provoked ; beareth all things ; endureth all things.”

Nor is a disposition to resentment and revenge consistent with a becoming regard to the Supreme Power ; for the genuine principles of religion would teach us, that even the passions and vices of men, under the direction of the wise governor of the world, contribute towards the general order and happiness ; and would enable us to bear with the infirmities of our brethren, with an humble reliance on that Providence which can bring harmony out of discord, good out of evil. It was on these principles that Joseph reasoned, when he said to his brethren, “ Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.”

There is yet another part of Joseph’s history, which places his character in a

peculiarly-amiable point of view, and suggests the most useful instructions ; namely, his behaviour towards his father and his brethren, after he had made himself known to them. Far from being ashamed of his descent from an obscure Canaanite, and his relation to a family of shepherds, he rejoiced in the opportunity which his rank and authority gave him, of making the last days of his aged parent easy and comfortable, and granting his whole family an agreeable settlement in Egypt. Had he been governed by that foolish vanity, which in weak and depraved minds is often the effect of sudden elevation, he would gladly have availed himself of the disguise which his new station afforded him, and continued unknown to his brethren : he would rather have chosen to suppress the efforts of natural affection on their unexpected appearance before him, than to disgrace himself by acknowledging such poor and obscure relations : or if, in the struggle between pride and natural affection, the latter had so far prevailed, as to induce him to afford them support and assistance, he would have thought the obligations of the filial and fraternal relations sufficiently discharged, by privately

granting them supplies in their own country.

But Joseph was too wise, and too good, to suffer any portion of this contemptible species of pride to find a place in his heart. The first ideas which occurred to his mind, after the tender emotions which attended the discovery of himself to his brethren had subsided, were, not, "How shall I avoid the disgrace which this discovery will bring upon me? In what manner shall I dispose of these poor shepherds, to escape the ridicule and contempt of the courtiers, and the king my master?" but "How shall I most effectually employ my power and influence in the service of my family?" His message to his father by his brethren was this, "God hath made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me, tarry not, and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen; and thou shalt be near me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast, and there will I nourish thee, lest thou and thy household and all that thou hast come to poverty." Joseph was persuaded that a life of pastoral simplicity would be much more agreeable to his

father and brethren, who had always followed the occupation of shepherds; than the artificial elegancies and ceremonies of the court ; he therefore fixed their residence in one of the most fertile and pleasant provinces of Egypt, the land of Goshen.

When Jacob received the welcome news that his son Joseph was still living, and the kind message which he had commissioned his brethren to deliver, his heart fainted for joy ; and on his revival he exclaimed, “It is enough! my son Joseph is yet alive ! I will go and see him before I die.” He immediately executed his purpose, and met with the most affectionate reception from his son. “Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet his father, and presented himself unto him, and he fell upon his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.”

The first tender interview being over, Joseph, neither ashamed of his relations, nor afraid that their occupation, which was esteemed dishonorable by the Egyptians, should expose them to difficulties or subject himself to obloquy, introduced his father and his brethren into the presence of the king. As if proud of his connection with the venerable old

man, “ he brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh.”

Let those who are so much the slaves of vanity, as to be capable of despising their poor relations and aged parents, read this part of the history of Joseph, and blush.

There is so much contemptible folly in being ashamed to own a father or brother, because fortune has not raised him to the same point of distinction, or decked him with the same ornaments, with ourselves ; that, without any other evidence, we may certainly pronounce the understanding of the man who is capable of such conduct weak and defective. And this behaviour withal implies so much ingratitude and insensibility, that we need not hesitate to determine, that such a man is, in a great measure at least, a stranger to the nobler and more generous virtues, and under the dominion of base and sordid passions. If there be a person in the world entitled to our respectful attention, our affectionate esteem, and our active services, it must surely be the tender and faithful parent, who has been the protector of our infant years, and the guide of our youth. ... Can any ac-

cidental distinctions we may have acquired, cancel our debt of gratitude, for the assiduous attentions and unceasing attentions of a fond mother, or for the early and unwearied endeavours of a kind father to render us wise, virtuous and happy ? Rather, ought not every increase of our fortune and consequence to furnish us with an additional motive, as it affords us new opportunities, to contribute to the ease and happiness of our parents in their advancing years ? Can any thing be more persuasive than the reasoning of the Son of Sirach on this head ?

“ Honour thy father with thy whole heart, and forget not the sorrows of thy mother ; for how canst thou recompense them the things that they have done for thee ? ”

---

ON THE  
CHARACTER  
OF  
MOSES.

---

ACTS VII. 22.

*And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.*

THERE are few characters preserved in ancient history more distinguished and illustrious than that of Moses. But it derives a great part of its lustre from events and actions, which are too far removed from the usual occurrences of life, and too much elevated above the common standard, to be capable of an easy application to the purposes of moral instruction. In the life of Moses, the philosopher will meet with many curious subjects of speculation, the statesman

with many interesting particulars relative to policy and government, and the divine with many important incidents respecting the history of religion, which the moralist, who considers characters solely with the view of deducing from them useful lessons for the conduct of life, will be obliged to pass by without notice. In this limited view of the actions and character of this great man, we shall however find them worthy of our serious attention, and capable of suggesting many important reflections.

The extraordinary circumstances which attended the birth and early education of Moses, are too interesting and instructive to be overlooked.

At that time, the Israelites were groaning under the yoke of Egyptian bondage. The present king, who knew not Joseph, jealous of their increasing numbers and strength, and fearful lest they should in some future time enter into an alliance with the enemies of Egypt, determined to harass and afflict, and as much as possible to crush them. "He made their lives bitter with hard bondage in all manner of service, and set over them task-masters to afflict them with their burdens." This rigorous treatment, however, did not

produce the effect which the king desired. Instead of being weakened and diminished by the hardships, which they suffered, "the more he afflicted them the more they multiplied." Observing this, he now resolved to add cruelty to oppression; and effectually to remove every ground of fear from this quarter, he formed and executed a plan for the total extirpation of their race. He issued an edict, "That every male child born of the Israelites should be cast into the river."

Ye who know the tender sensations and warm attachments of parental affection, imagine, for ye alone can imagine ---the consternation and horror with which this barbarous edict must have been received. Imagine the glow of honest indignation which would be kindled in every father's breast; conceive what agonizing pangs would tear the mother's heart, while the sentence of death was pronounced upon the dear helpless infant yet unborn. Surely the most refined philosophy will pardon the equivocation, by which the Hebrew midwives evaded the king's order: surely the most zealous advocate for implicit obedience & regal authority, will not censure those

parents who, as far as they were able, disobeyed a command which violated the first law of nature, counteracted the most powerful instinct of humanity, and opposed the sovereign authority of heaven.

The mother of Moses, choosing to obey nature and God rather than man, hid her son three months. And when she found it impossible to conceal him longer, as the last expedient for his safety, she put him into an ark of bull-rushes properly secured against the water, and laid him among the rushes by the river side, near the place where the king's daughter and her attendants usually came to bathe. Then leaving the child, doubtless with distressing anxiety, but not without hope that some fortunate incident might occur, she stationed her daughter not far from the place to observe the issue.

Soon after, the young princess, Pharaoh's daughter, came with her attendants to the river side. She immediately cast her eye upon the ark lying among the rushes, and, curious to know the contents, sent one of her maidens to fetch it. The mother to preserve the child as long as she could, had covered it up with care in its rushy cradle, which

without some friendly hand to save it, must shortly have been its grave. The princess removed the covering and found ---a child. "And behold the babe wept." The cries of infants find easy access to the female heart. Though the helpless innocent knew not its danger, nor was able to beg for protection; its piteous tears spoke to the feelings of the young princess with an eloquence which no prejudices of education, no pride of rank, no motives of interest or prudence, could withstand.

She soon discovered that it belonged to one of the Hebrews. It was a child of such mean and ignoble birth, as might seem beneath the notice of a royal princess. It sprung from a race of strangers, who had no natural claim to protection and favour in Egypt. It came under the sentence of her father's edict against the male children of the Israelites. To attempt its rescue might therefore be construed into an act of disobedience to him, and rebellion against the government, and might expose her to private resentment and public censure. Any of these circumstances may be supposed to have arisen in her mind upon the discovery of the

child; and to a prejudiced and bigoted understanding, a cowardly and timorous spirit, or a selfish and unfeeling heart, might have furnished an apology for leaving the helpless infant to perish. But, either she was so wholly lost in the emotions of pity which the incident excited as to be inattentive to every other consideration, or (which is more probable) the principles of generosity and compassion had such a commanding power within her, as to overbalance every inferior motive.

"She had compassion on the child."

His sister, who stood near, observing the favourable notice which the princess took of her infant brother, ventured to speak a word in his behalf, and offered to go and call one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for her. The princess listened to the proposal, which accorded with her benevolent intentions, and sent her to seek for a nurse. The messenger, who was at no loss to whom to apply, ran and called the child's mother. With what pleasure the mother received and obeyed the summons, which banished all her fears and placed herself and her son under the protection of the king's daughter, may be better conceived than expressed. Doubtless with a joy-

ful heart and eager steps she came to the place ; but probably suppressed the emotions which agitated her mind, that she might conceal from the princess the circumstance of her being the mother of the child. The princess, with all the dignity and grace which became her rank, and with all the condescension and sweetness which female tenderness could inspire, took the child in her arms, and delivered it to the mother, saying, "Take this child, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages."

Greatness never appears so truly respectable, as when employed in acts of mercy. The daughter of Pharaoh king of Egypt never shone with half such attractive charms, when decked with every ornament which the wealth and taste of Egypt could supply, and surrounded with all the splendors of her father's court, as at the moment when she uttered these words.

The mother carried home her lovely charge in triumph, and faithfully executed the pleasing task assigned her. Nor did the princess afterwards repent of her kindness, or desert the child whose life she had saved. When he grew up she adopted him as her son, introduced him

to the court of Egypt, and obtained for him the favour of the king. It was through her bounty that he was nursed in his infancy, and instructed in his childhood and youth, and that he afterwards became “ learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in words and deeds.”

The species of charity which the Egyptian princess exhibited on this occasion, is well deserving of imitation. The care of children who are left in a forlorn and destitute condition, or whose parents are unable to provide for their support and education, is an act of kindness dictated by the principles of humanity, and productive of great benefits to society. Whether these acts of charity are performed in private by individuals, or publicly in institutions established for the purpose, if they be conducted with a tolerable share of discretion, they cannot fail of being in a high degree beneficial. As ye have therefore opportunity, let the helpless infant, or the deserted orphan, become objects of your charitable notice. “ Be thou as a father to the fatherless, and thou shalt be as the son of the Most High.”

But, not to lose sight of the principal character which it is the design of this discourse to exhibit, let us pass from the infancy of Moses, to the time in which he first makes his appearance in the sacred history as the deliverer of Israel.

Moses, after having for many years resided in the court of Egypt, observed with concern the oppressed state of his brethren the Israelites; and retaining a warm attachment to his nation, he formed the generous design of visiting them in their state of bondage, probably with a view to find out some means for their relief. In order to accomplish his purpose, he voluntarily resigned his connection with the Egyptian court, and took up his residence among his poor and despised countrymen. Neither the charms of wealth and power, or the enticements of pleasure on the one hand, nor the dread of Pharaoh's resentment, and the certain expectation of poverty, distress, and contempt on the other, were sufficient to overcome the generous principles which attached him to his countrymen, or divert him from his resolution to exert himself in their favour. Relying on the goodness of his cause, and on the assistance and blessing of the

God of his fathers, and firmly perswaded that he should be able, under his direction to effect his purpose, he went forth and joined himself to his brethren. This is the part of his character for which he is so highly and justly celebrated by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. “ By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter: choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”

The distinguishing trait in the character of this great man, which was displayed not only in the present instance, but through all the transactions of his future life, and to which as their source all his other virtues may be traced, was a generous, disinterested, zealous attention to the interests of his brethren. And indeed it may be observed as a general maxim, that the real merit of any character is always in proportion to the degree in which the social principles prevail over the selfish. The man who discovers, by the whole course of his actions, that he lives for himself alone, and who makes no scruple of sacrificing the interest of others to his own, is always

beheld with contempt ; while he who consults the ease, convenience and happiness of all around him, and cheerfully foregoes his own private indulgence or advantage to procure more important benefits for others, concerning whom it may be said that " he seeketh not his own profit but the profit of many," is an object of general esteem and admiration.

It is of little consequence in determining the degree of moral worth in any character, to take into the account the situation in which a man is placed, or the sphere in which he acts. The principles which have the chief sway in his mind, and are the leading springs of his actions, are in the first place to be regarded. And a man may discover as much benevolence and generosity of spirit in an obscure station, or in the retirements of domestic life, as could be displayed in performing the most public and distinguishing part on the great theatre of the world. Whether your rank in life, and the connexions in which you are placed, give you an opportunity of serving your country by the wisdom of council or the valour of arms, or by performing offices instituted for the benefit of the community ; or whether

your contracted circumstances and humble station only permit you to contribute to the public good by a cheerful submission to lawful authority, and a diligent and conscious discharge of the private duties of life ; you have, in either case, sufficient opportunities of manifesting those dispositions, which chiefly distinguish one man from another, and which will entitle you to honour and esteem. Cherish the benevolent and generous affections ; live for others as well as for yourself ; and whether you be high or low, rich or poor, your character shall be respected while you live, and posterity will say concerning you, what the Son of Sirach says concerning Moses, “ He was beloved of God and men, and his memorial is blessed.”

Where the benevolent principle is predominant, it will dictate a thousand acts of kindness, which would never have fallen in the way of the selfish man : it will point out innumerable opportunities of obliging and serving others in the common incidents of life ; and will be as industrious in seeking, and as ready to embrace such opportunities, as to display itself before the world in the more splendid scenes of public action. The same

generous spirit which first brought Moses from the Egyptian court to the tents of the Israelites, and led him to form the great design of their deliverance, directed his behaviour in an adventure which he met with on his entrance into the country of Midian after he had left Egypt.

Sitting down by the side of a well to refresh himself, it happened that there came up to the well the daughters of a neighbouring shepherd to draw water for their father's flock. In this country, where water was scarce, it was the custom, that those shepherds who first got possession of a well might claim it as their own for that time. Notwithstanding this, certain shepherds who came immediately afterwards to the same place, attempted to deprive the young females of their right and drive them away. Moses had too much native generosity, and had been too well instructed in the rules of good-breeding, not to perceive the injustice and rudeness of this behaviour, or to be capable of remaining inactive on such an occasion. "He stood up, and helped them, and watered their flocks." How happily his civility was rewarded,

the sequel of the story shows : “ When they came to Reuel their father, he said, How is it that ye come so soon to-day ? and they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew water for us, and watered the flock. And he said unto his daughters, And where is he ? Why is it that ye have left the man ? Call him that he may eat bread. And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter.” This story, at the same time that it gives us a beautiful specimen of the simplicity of ancient manners, exhibits an instructive pattern of that courtesy and civility, which are the natural offspring of an humane and generous temper.

The same spirit which governed Moses when in Egypt, and while he dwelt in the land of Midian, afterwards inspired him with resolution to undertake the arduous office to which he was appointed by the Lord ; and displayed itself through all the interesting scenes which passed after he became the saviour and the lawgiver of Israel.

During their long passage through the wilderness, neither the toils and hardships of the way, nor even the discontent

“ Shal-

and ingratitude of the people, could abate the ardour of his affection for his countrymen, or dishearten him in his endeavours to serve them.

It was a striking instance of his generosity and public spirit, that when some of his friends informed him that two men in the camp prophesied, and thro' their zeal for his honour requested him to forbid them, he replied, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them." Every idea of personal honour or distinction vanished, when brought into competition with the good of his countrymen; and he could cheerfully see others distinguished by the same powers with himself, if by this means the general interest might be promoted.

Actuated by such patriotic principles himself, he could not bear to see a selfish and cowardly spirit in others. Hence it was, that when he found two of the tribes disposed to make a settlement before they arrived at the country destined for them, and leave their brethren to encounter the hardships of war, he rebuked them in this animated language: "Shall your brethren go to war? and

shall ye sit here? Wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel, from going over into the land which the Lord hath given them?"

To the same noble principle we are to ascribe that part of his character, for which he has been so highly celebrated, his meekness. It was because his love to his countrymen was steady and invincible, that he endured all their complaints and reproaches with such persevering calmness, as to obtain this character, "that he was very meek above all the men that dwelt upon the face of the earth." When the people insulted him with their murmurings, saying, "Would to God we had died in Egypt, for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger; his mild reply was: "What are we that ye murmur against us? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord." And when the Lord had punished Miriam for her contumacious treatment of Moses, far from triumphing in her punishment, he pitied her distress, and prayed unto the Lord, saying, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee." How striking the resemblance between this prayer and that of

Jesuſ for his enemies, “ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do ! ”

From this example of meekness, let us learn to cultivate that charity which is “ not easily provoked, which suffereth long, and is kind.” To enable us to practise the virtue of meekness, it is neither necessary that we should be possessed of distinguished abilities, nor placed in an exalted station. Every relation, every situation in life, affords us sufficient opportunities for the exercise of this temper. In every family, little incidents will sometimes occur, to disturb domestic tranquillity. In the most common transactions of life, opinions will sometimes clash ; contrary inclinations will arise ; real or imaginary interests will interfere ; and fretfulness and peevishness will create vexation, and provoke contention without any sufficient ground. In the more important concerns of civil policy or religion, different and even opposite systems will be adopted ; parties will be formed ; on both sides vague declamation, and perhaps bitter invective, will be substituted in the room of cool reasoning and solid argument ; and angry debates and fierce contentions will

ensue. In the present state of human nature, we need not therefore be at a loss for occasions to exercise a meek and gentle temper. And if we be properly under the influence of the principle of benevolence, we shall never want the inclination. This inward monitor will teach us to make the same candid allowances for the mistakes, prejudices, and humours of others, which we expect others to make for our own: it will prompt us to endure with much patience and good humour, that petulance and spleen, which we are able to impute to any other cause than malignity of disposition: it will even enable us to suffer designed affronts and real injuries without losing the command of ourselves, or indulging the desire of revenge; and to obey that divine precept of our holy religion, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

ON THE  
CHARACTER  
OF  
J O B.

JOB I. I.

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil.

IT is not easy to determine whether there be greater virtue in preserving our innocence and supporting a respectable and useful character in prosperity and affluence, or in sustaining the burdens of adversity with a patient and cheerful mind. If it be true, that notwithstanding natural fortitude, but moral and religious principles thoroughly establish-

ed and vigorously exercised, are necessary to enable a man to endure disappointments, bodily pain and other calamities, without sinking into despondency, or becoming a prey to the restless passions of fretfulness and discontent ; it is not less true, that nothing but a just sense of the obligations of morality and religion, and a deliberate and steady determination to prefer innocence of character and peace of mind to every thing else, can be sufficient to secure a man against the allurements of vicious pleasure, the snares of ambition, and all the assaults which his virtue must suffer in a season of prosperity. Good principles and habits are our only security in any condition of human life ; and if we are possessed of these, we are prepared for every event which can befall us.

We may then justly pronounce that man's virtue sincere and steady, whom neither the smiles of fortune can seduce, nor her frowns deter, from the practice of his duty ; who preserves his manners unblemished and his heart uncorrupted, alike in prosperity and in adversity. Such is the character which is at this time to be presented to our view. In

the most remote extremes of fortune, when he was surrounded with every enticement to vice, and when he was oppressed by every calamity which could be supposed to overpower his virtue, "Job was a perfect and upright man."

In every condition of our lives, whether we be rich or poor, prosperous or afflicted, we have therefore in Job a pattern worthy of our attentive regard and careful imitation; a pattern which will teach us, better than all the precepts of philosophy, "both how to be abased, and how to abound."

For the particulars of Job's character in the years of his prosperity, we must have recourse to the account which he gives of himself, in the honest apology for his past life, which was extorted from him by the ungenerous insinuations and cruel accusations of his friends.

The riches which he possessed, though they raised him above his brethren in rank and consequence, did not elate his heart with pride; they neither inspired him with deceitful expectations of advantages which they are incapable of bestowing, nor led him to entertain extravagant ideas of his own consequence, and treat others less distinguished than

himself with contempt. "He did not make gold his hope, nor say unto fine gold, thou art my confidence; he rejoiced not because his wealth was great, and because his hand had gotten much." Free from pride, he was also a stranger to its natural offspring revenge, and never indulged him in malevolent wishes against his enemies, or in a spiteful triumph over their misfortunes. "He rejoiced not at the destruction of him that hated him, nor suffered his mouth to sin, by wishing a curse to his soul." He employed not his power in acts of oppression and severity, nor ever refused to distribute impartial justice among the weak and defenceless, and even among the lowest of his dependents; for religion had taught him that all men are on a level in the sight of their Maker, and that wealth and power will be no security against his displeasure, in the day when the unrighteous and the oppressor shall stand before his tribunal. "He with-held not the poor from their desire, nor caused the eyes of the widow to fail; he despised not the cause of his man servant, or of his maid servant, when they contended with him; for he said within himself, What then shall I do, when

God riseth up? And when he visiteth,  
what shall I answer him? Did not he  
that made me in the womb make him?  
Did not one fashion us in the womb?"

In the exercise of that authority which  
his wealth or his station in society gave  
him, he preserved an inviolable regard  
to truth and justice. "He put on righ-  
teousness and it cloathed him, and his  
judgment was as a robe and a diadem." He  
employed his abundance for the ben-  
efit of his brethren, exercising hospital-  
ity to strangers, supplying the wants of  
the poor, and taking the fatherless and  
widow and such as were oppressed under  
his protection. "The stranger did not  
lodge in the street, but he opened his  
doors to the traveller; he did not eat  
his morsel himself alone, but the father-  
less and widow did eat thereof with him." "Did not I weep," says he, "for him  
that was in trouble, and was not my soul  
grieved for the poor? I delivered the  
poor that cried, and the fatherless, and  
him that had none to help him; the  
blessing of him that was ready to perish  
came upon me, and I caused the widow's  
heart to sing for joy: I was a father to  
the poor, and the cause which I knew  
not I searched out."

These were the virtues which adorned the character of Job in the days of his prosperity. Let those who are blessed with abundance, in imitation of his example, “not be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth richly all things to enjoy ; let them do good, be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”

The history of Job suggests two very powerful motives, to engage those who are in affluent circumstances to practise the virtues of prosperity ; that it will procure them honour and respect while their prosperous days continue ; and that it will furnish them with the best support, if, in the course of human affairs, poverty and affliction should hereafter be their portion.

Moderation, integrity, generosity, and the rest of that lovely train of virtues which are the principal ornaments of an exalted station, and give the highest value to a plentiful fortune, were doubtless the chief ground of the distinction which Job obtained among his countrymen. It was on account of his wisdom and goodness, more than his wealth that “when he went out unto the city,

young men who saw him retired, and the aged arose and stood up ; that men gave ear unto him, and waited, and kept silence at his council ; that when the ear heard him, it blessed him, and that when the eye saw him, it gave witness unto him." Real esteem and honour, are only to be obtained by intellectual and moral accomplishments. Authority may create fear ; an ability to confer favours may command a servile attention ; a splendid appearance may attract the gaze of vulgar admiration ; and ceremonious civility and artful adulation may wait upon superior rank : but the rich and powerful are then only sincerely respected, when they discover a superior understanding, manly views, and laudable purposes in the use and application of their wealth ; they are then only heartily beloved, when they soften the splendors of their station by condescension and humility, and distribute the superfluities of their wealth, with a judicious but liberal hand, in acts of beneficence.

That a wise and virtuous use of prosperity is the best preparation for adversity, the remaining part of the history of Job, in which we are to follow him

These were the virtues which adorned the character of Job in the days of his prosperity. Let those who are blessed with abundance, in imitation of his example, "not be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth richly all things to enjoy ; let them do good, be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate."

The history of Job suggests two very powerful motives, to engage those who are in affluent circumstances to practise the virtues of prosperity ; that it will procure them honour and respect while their prosperous days continue ; and that it will furnish them with the best support, if, in the course of human affairs, poverty and affliction should hereafter be their portion.

Moderation, integrity, generosity, and the rest of that lovely train of virtues which are the principal ornaments of an exalted station, and give the highest value to a plentiful fortune, were doubtless the chief ground of the distinction which Job obtained among his countrymen. It was on account of his wisdom and goodness, more than his wealth that "when he went out unto the city, the

young men who saw him retired, and the aged arose and stood up ; that men gave ear unto him, and waited, and kept silence at his council ; that when the ear heard him, it blessed him, and that when the eye saw him, it gave witness unto him." Real esteem and honour, are only to be obtained by intellectual and moral accomplishments. Authority may create fear ; an ability to confer favours may command a servile attention ; a splendid appearance may attract the gaze of vulgar admiration ; and ceremonious civility and artful adulation may wait upon superior rank : but the rich and powerful are then only sincerely respected, when they discover a superior understanding, manly views, and laudable purposes in the use and application of their wealth ; they are then only heartily beloved, when they soften the splendors of their station by condescension and humility, and distribute the superfluities of their wealth, with a judicious but liberal hand, in acts of beneficence.

That a wise and virtuous use of prosperity is the best preparation for adversity, the remaining part of the history of Job, in which we are to follow him

through a long series of misfortunes and afflictions, and to observe the sources from whence he derived consolation under them, will sufficiently prove.

To give us a just idea of the nature and degree of Job's afflictions, it will be necessary that we take a brief survey of the happy condition in which he lived before his calamities fell upon him. It had pleased the Almighty to reward his uprightness and piety with remarkable success in his affairs. And to extend and perpetuate his enjoyments, God had blessed him with a numerous and flourishing family : he had seven sons and three daughters." These he had doubtless educated with all the tender anxieties of parental affection : and he had now the satisfaction of seeing several of them settled in distinct families ; for the history relates that it was a custom among them to meet by turns in each other's houses for social entertainment.

It was at this season, when he enjoyed all the happiness which a plentiful fortune, a flourishing family, and honour and respect among his countrymen could afford ; when in his own expressive language, " the Almighty was yet with him, when his children were about him,

when the rock poured him out rivers of oil, when his root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon his branches, when he said, I shall multiply my days as the sand ; ” it was at this season that he was on a sudden oppressed by a weight of affliction which might seem too heavy for human strength to support.

In one fatal day he received the distressing tidings, that part of his substance was destroyed by rapine and violence, that what had escaped the hands of robbers was consumed by lightning, and that while his children were enjoying the festal hour, a violent hurricane had overturned the house in which they were assembled, and buried them in its ruins. His flocks and herds, his servants, his children, were all, all cut off at once, not one of the dear supports of his house was left to comfort him under the loss of the rest. The whole weight of his woe fell upon him in a moment : he had no intimation of the approaching storm ; no time allowed him to prepare for the alarming scene : “ when he looked for joy then came sorrow.” These external calamities were succeeded by a painful and loathsome disease in his own body,

so that “he was made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights were appointed to him.” Lastly, to fill up the measure of his afflictions, his familiar friends, who might have been expected to pour the balm of consolation into his wounded spirit, were estranged from him, and “they whom he loved were turned against him.” They insinuated the most unfriendly suspicions concerning his former character, and ascribed his calamities to some concealed crimes, for which the Almighty had seen fit to inflict upon him such heavy punishments. “They heaped their reproaches upon him, and persecuted him with cruel words.” Even the wife of his bosom, instead of soothing his sorrows with the gentle accents of tenderness, would fain have urged him to the last extremities of impious discontent and despair; she said unto him, “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die.”

How did Job support this accumulated load of calamity? The narration informs us, that after the messengers had acquainted him with the misfortunes which had befallen his possessions, and the death of his children, “he rent his

mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground." He felt all the sorrow which was natural on such an occasion ; and he expressed his grief by the tokens which were usual among his countrymen :

" He could not but remember such things were,  
That were most precious to him."

And he did not with-hold the tear which nature taught him to shed, on the reflection that they were now no more. But he proceeded no farther : he murmured not at the appointments of heaven : he upbraided not the Almighty with having requited him evil for all his obedience and fidelity : he renounced not religion as an unprofitable thing ; nor did he, in the madness of despair, cast back his life into the hands of his Maker as a gift not worth his acceptance. Heavy, sudden, and numerous as his calamities were, " Job sinned not, neither charged God foolishly. He worshipped God, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither : the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord."

To his wife's passionate exclamation, his calm and pious reply was, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh: What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" And though afterwards his grievous bodily sufferings, and above all the unkindness and severity of his friends, sometimes drew from him bitter complaints, he never charged his Maker with injustice, or repented that he had served God. Under all his afflictions, he referred himself to the righteousness and mercy of his Maker, and supported himself with the persuasion, that he would at last vindicate his innocence. Conscious that "these things had not befallen him for any iniquity in his hands;" able to make his appeal to heaven, and say, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked;" in the lowest depths of sorrow he could derive support and consolation from religion: "My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God: behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high: my foot hath held his steps; his way have I kept and not declined, neither have I gone back from the commandments of his lips: he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me,

I shall come forth as gold. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright ;" for even in the sorrows of that man there is peace !

In the history of this perfect and upright man, we have a most affecting proof of the instability of all earthly possessions ; and at the same time a most instructive lesson, to direct us in preparing for every vicissitude in life.

You are at present, perhaps, in a situation, which exempts you from the burdens and afflictions which others suffer, and affords you every enjoyment that is in any degree essential to the happiness of life ; and you flatter yourselves that many years of ease and prosperity yet lie before you : but "boast not yourself of to-morrow, for you know not what a day may bring forth."

That substance which your own industry or that of your ancestors had collected, and from which you promise yourself plentiful supplies for the relief of your wants, and the gratification of your desires, is liable to be destroyed by the unsuccessfulness of your future undertakings, by the assaults of fraud or violence, or by sudden and unavoidable misfortunes.

Though you now enjoy vigorous health and cheerful spirits, and may apprehend that in your constitution nature has laid a sure foundation for their long continuance, and that your sobriety and discretion are additional securities for the uninterrupted enjoyment of this fundamental blessing ; it is possible that the seeds of some painful and destructive disease may be at this instant lurking in your veins ; that, by some event apparently accidental and wholly unforeseen, or by general causes which you are so far from being able to remove that it is beyond your skill to explain, the whole animal machine may be thrown into disorder, the operations of nature may become irregular, and pain and sickness may take possession of your frame, and bid defiance to the skill of the physician and the power of medicine.

If you are now surrounded by faithful friends, whose presence enlivens your hours, whose counsel directs your steps, and whose kindness and affection is a perpetual cordial to your spirits ; or if you now enjoy the sincere pleasures of parental love, while you see your offspring gradually unfolding the powers of reason, while they twine about your

hearts by a thousand nameless endearments, while you delight yourselves with flattering expectations concerning their future character and situation in life, and promise yourself that they will reap the fruits of your labours and rise up to call you blessed; presume not with too much confidence on the continuance of these blessings. Let the mournful experience of others remind you, that your dearest friends and even your beloved offspring are mortal. Think it not strange, if, at some unexpected hour, disease and death should rob you of these inestimable treasures, and leave you nothing but the bitter remembrance that you once possessed them.

To such calamities as these the frail children of mortality are continually liable: and the more numerous are our present earthly possessions, to the greater variety of losses and afflictions we are exposed. This is the natural and unavoidable lot of man. But, let us not pine at our condition, or think it hard, that "man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble;" for the great Father of men, who hath allotted us our several portions of good and ill, hath not left us without consola-

tion in the darkest season of adversity. By the moral principles which he hath implanted within us, and the powers of reflection with which he hath endued us, he hath furnished us with inexhaustible sources of comfort within ourselves, when external springs of enjoyment are dried up. The good man, who has faithfully performed the duties of his station and accomplished the great ends of life while his day of prosperity continued, is prepared to meet the most sudden and distressing reverse of fortune, not indeed without painful emotions, but without despondence and discontent; for he has a treasure lodged in his heart, of which no misfortune can ever deprive him, and which will be an inexhaustible fund of peaceful reflections and pleasing hopes. Conscious integrity will be as “an anchor to his soul, sure and steadfast.”

That which gives the principal value to this mental treasure is, that it entitles us to the consolations of religion and enables us to look up to the great Governor of the world with an humble confidence in his mercy. If we can reflect that, far from having abused the talents with which we have been entrusted,

ed, we have sincerely and diligently employed them in the cultivation and improvement of our own minds, and in the service of our fellow-creatures ; we may assure ourselves that our sufferings are not inflicted upon us as punishments for our sins, but appointed by unerring wisdom and perfect goodness for our real advantage. A consciousness of upright intentions, and the remembrance of a virtuous life, will give us authority to apply the general principles of religion to our own support, under the particular calamities which befall us : and to make that great and good Being who governs the world our retreat and refuge, under every painful thought, and in every hour of distress.

What then remains, but that we prepare ourselves for all the calamities which may hereafter befall us, by resolutely preserving our innocence, and faithfully obeying the dictates of our conscience, and the laws of God, in every condition and relation of life ? Let us deliberately form, and stedfastly adhere to, the resolution of Job ; " All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils ; my lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue ut-

ter deceit : till I die I will not remove my integrity from me : my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go ; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live."

ON THE  
CHARACTER

♦ ♦

D A V I D.

2 SAMUEL VII. 8.

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheep-cot, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israël.*

**A**MONG the many bad effects of controversy, this is one, that characters, which are supposed to be connected with the question in dispute, are liable to be misrepresented by zealots on either side; so that between the extravagant encomiums of the panegyrist, and the ridicule and obloquy of the satirist, it is extremely difficult for the impartial

L

enquirer to discover the truth. This hath been remarkably the case with respect to the character of David.

Some ingenuity and wit, and no small share of severity and ill-nature, not to add misrepresentation and abuse, have been employed by the opponents of revelation, to sink the character of David into universal contempt. And much learning and critical skill have been displayed by the advocates for christianity, in their apologies for this favourite character. But, both parties might have spared themselves much unnecessary labour ; for the determination of the degrees of moral merit or demerit in the character of David is by no means of essential consequence in the great question concerning revelation. David is indeed, in scripture, styled "the man after God's own heart, who should fulfil all his will ;" but all that can be fairly inferred from hence is, that he was one whom the Almighty judged to be a proper person to rule over Israel, and particularly that he was qualified and disposed to carry on the great design of preserving the worship of the one true God among the Israelites, while the neighbouring nations were wholly given to idolatry.

The history of David's reign sufficiently shows, that in this sense he was indeed a man after God's own heart ; and it is as unnecessary as it would be fruitless, to attempt to accommodate all the actions of his life to any other interpretation of the words.

We are then at full liberty to examine the character of David with impartiality ; and need to be under no apprehension of injuring the cause of religion, if, while we admire its virtues, we freely censure its defects and blemishes, and paint the heinous crimes which disgraced it in their true colours. The latter are no less adapted to afford us moral instruction than the former ; and moral instruction is the great end of preaching.

In the early part of David's life, we meet with an illustrious instance of true courage. While he was yet but a youth, and unskilled in martial exercises, he undertook to meet a champion of the Philistines, who had given a general challenge to the men of Israel, and engage him in single combat ; and, without any other weapon than a sling and a stone, "he smote the Philistine and slew him." In this brave exploit he was supported,

not by natural fortitude alone, but by religious principles, which will always be found the most secure and steady basis of an heroic character. When he went forth against the Philistine, he said, "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a shield ; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel."

Such principles as these are entirely discarded out of the system of modern heroism. The champions of the present day give and accept the challenge, not like the ancient heroes of Greece and Rome, to save their country, or obtain for themselves immortal renown ; nor like this young hero, to support the honour of the God of his fathers ; but, to decide some disputed question ; to give or obtain satisfaction for some affront, generally trifling, often imaginary ; or to settle some point of honour, for the determining of which no provision is made in courts of law or equity. Thus is that bold and martial spirit, in which our ancestors vied with the greatest names of antiquity, debased, and vanished into the mere phantom of false honour.

With an heroic spirit we find united, in the character of David, no small share of discretion and prudence, a union rarely to be met with in young persons. In situations which required great circumspection ; at first while he was a favourite with his master Saul, king of Israel ; and afterwards when he was the object of his envy and malice, he maintained such a steady propriety of conduct, as procured him general esteem. "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways, so that his name was much set by."

It was doubtless on account of these and other shining and amiable qualities, that Jonathan, the Son of Saul, attached himself warmly to David, and maintained an intimate and affectionate friendship with him as long as he lived. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." His friendship was not of that superficial kind, which glitters to the eye, and amuses the ear, without finding its way to the heart ; nor was it of so flimsy a texture, as to be torn in pieces by the first blast of adverse fortune. It rendered him anxious for the

safety of his friend, and urged him to hazard his own in his defence. Though David's enemy was Jonathan's own father, and the king of Israel, who would doubtless be highly offended by every attempt to justify or screen him, and who had it in his power to inflict severe punishment wherever he pleased ; yet Jonathan not only ventured to neglect his father's cruel command to kill David, but informed him of his danger, and employed his interest with Saul to obtain a reconciliation. And when he found that all his efforts for this purpose only procured a short respite for his friend, but produced no change in his father's dispositions ; because he was convinced that envy and jealousy were the foundation of his implacable aversion to David, and saw that nothing but his death would satisfy him ; he contrived means for his friend's escape, and having comforted him in his hazardous situation by this kind assurance, "Whatever thy soul desireth I will do for thee," he took an affectionate leave of him, and returned to his father's house.

That the friendship was mutual, and that David long retained a grateful remembrance of the generous services

which his friend had rendered him, is sufficiently evident from the grief which he expressed on receiving the news of his death, and the bitter lamentation which he uttered on the occasion. "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle ! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thy high places ! I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan ; very pleasant hast thou been unto me : thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women ! How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished !"

From this instance of sincere and permanent friendship, we may learn to correct and improve our ideas on this important subject. It is really surprising to observe, how few ingredients are at present required to make up this cordial of life ; on what easy terms the appellation of a friend is obtained or bestowed. If one man treats you with civility in the common intercourses of life, and addresses you with the customary forms of attention and politeness ; and especially if he mingles with his complaints a small portion of flattery, he is your friend. If another makes you his companion, and entertains you with the curiosities of his table ; if he invites you

to be a spectator of the magnificence or elegance which he displays in his manner of living ; to fill up the train of his admirers while he sets himself forth as a man of taste, learning, or humour ; or perhaps, to supply his own defects, and furnish his guests with that entertainment which his own uncultivated understanding and shallow capacity is unable to provide---he is your friend. If your superior has occasion for your services, a condescending smile, a little flattery judiciously administered, and a few professions of attention to your interests, shall perhaps be sufficient to captivate your heart, and to give you a full assurance that you enjoy the honour of his friendship. But let us not be deceived by appearances, nor delude ourselves by the mere sound of words ; for “there is a friend who is only a friend in name.” Before we pronounce a man to be a friend indeed, we should be well assured that he has a heart susceptible of tender and generous feelings, and that he is capable of performing substantial and disinterested acts of kindness.

Concerning the man you call your friend, tell me, Will he weep with you of sympathy in the hour of your distress ? Will he faithfully, v

## D A V I D.

129

fully reprove you to your face, for actions for which others are ridiculing or censuring you behind your back ? Will he dare to stand forth in your defence, when detraction is secretly aiming its deadly weapons at your reputation ? Will he acknowledge you with the same cordiality, and behave to you with the same friendly attention, in the company of your superiors in rank and fortune, as when the claims of pride or vanity do not interfere with those of friendship ? If misfortunes and losses should oblige you to retire into a walk of life, in which you cannot appear with the same distinction, or entertain your friends with the same liberality as formerly, will he still think himself happy in your society, and, instead of gradually withdrawing himself from an unprofitable connexion, take pleasure in professing himself your friend, and cheerfully assist you to support the burden of your afflictions ? When sickness shall call you to retire from the gay and busy scenes of the world, will he follow you into your gloomy retreat, listen with attention to your "tale of symptoms," and minister the balm of consolation to your fainting spirit ? And lastly, when death shall burst asunder

every earthly tie, will he shed a tear upon your grave, and lodge the dear remembrance of your mutual friendship in his heart, as a treasure never to be resigned ? The man who will not do all this, may be your companion, your flatterer, your seducer ; but, believe me, he is not your friend.

Another amiable part of the character of David is the forbearing and forgiving temper, which he exercised in repeated instances towards Saul. Tho' from the first moment when Saul discovered that David was a favourite with the people, he entertained the most determined and malicious spirit of revenge against him ; though he made repeated attempts upon his life, and pursued him from place to place, " as one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains ; " yet when an opportunity was presented to David of taking away the life of his enemy, he suffered him to escape, and only cut off the skirt of his robe ; nay, such was the tenderness of his mind that he even repented of this : " David's heart smote him because he had cut off Saul's skirt." And again, when another occasion offered itself of putting an end by violence to that enmity, which he found it im-

possible to overcome by gentleness and forbearance ; he still persevered in his resolution, not to stretch forth his hand against the Lord's Anointed. Finding Saul asleep in the field, " he took the spear and the cruse of water that stood by his pillow, and departed."

On such treatment as this, it is impossible even for malice itself not to feel some relentings. Saul felt and acknowledged his own weakness, and the superior merit of David's character. " Thou art more righteous than I ; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." Still however the malignant passions prevailed over reason and humanity : and Saul continued to persecute David, till at length he was obliged to take up his residence in a distant country. But though David's attempt to melt down the resentment of his adversary by kindness proved unsuccessful, he had nevertheless the satisfaction to reflect, that he was more righteous than Saul, his enemy himself being a judge ; and he doubtless felt more pleasure from the recollection of his forbearance, than the most complete gratification of his resentment could have afforded him.

To little minds revenge may be sweet; but great and generous spirits feel a consciousness of dignity and merit in rendering good for evil, with which the pleasure of revenge cannot deserve to be compared. They know by experience the truth of the maxim, “ That by taking revenge a man is but even with his enemy ; but in passing it over, he is his superior.”

The character of David was moreover distinguished by the most elevated and ardent piety. Through the several scenes of his life he maintained a regard to the providence of God, acknowledged the loving kindness of the Lord in all the prosperous events which occurred, and in all his afflictions made the Lord his refuge, and the Most High his consolation. He cherished and strengthened his pious affections, by a devout performance of religious duties ; and employed the influence of his example, no less than his authority, to preserve the worship of the one true God uncorrupted, in the midst of the idolatries which were practised among the neighbouring nations. To promote the genuine spirit of piety, both in himself and others, on every proper occasion, public or private he

composed a sacred ode or psalm ; in which it hath been justly observed, that “ the boldest figure of eastern poetry are united with a simplicity which makes them intelligible to the common ear : the sublimest ideas are given of the Deity ; he is spoken of with the deepest reverence, and yet with all the warmth and pathos of personal gratitude and affection.”\*

Whether we consider the piety of David as an habitual temper of mind, or as a warm emotion of the heart occasionally expressed in solemn acts of worship, it is highly deserving of imitation. For a settled habit of piety is at once the most powerful and universal principle of a virtuous character, and the surest ground of tranquillity amidst the vicissitudes of life : and the cultivation and exercise of the devout affections is a source of refined and sublime pleasures, which will always be highly valued by those who have experienced them.

Having thus largely insisted on the amiable and respectable parts of David’s character, our design obliges us to reverse the picture, and take some notice of his

\* Mrs. Barbauld’s *Essay on the Devotional Taste*.

crimes. And here, we shall pass over several actions which, though not capable of a satisfactory vindication, are barely mentioned in general terms by the sacred historian, to leave room for a more particular attention to a fact which is circumstantially related, and from which the most useful reflections may be deduced.

The fact was this. David, being on a sudden enamoured with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, who was at that time with the army at the siege of Rabbah; in defiance of all the laws of honour and religion, and every virtuous and generous principle, accomplished his purpose. And, finding that it would be impossible to conceal this illicit amour without recalling Uriah, he ordered him to return home. Uriah, however, after his return refusing to visit his family, David was disappointed in his design, and was obliged to seek for some other expedient to prevent a public discovery of his crime. The expedient he adopted was in itself still more criminal, than the action it was intended to conceal; it was nothing less than a deliberate plot against the life of Uriah; whom he expressly commanded Joab to place in the

forefront of the hottest battle, and then to retire from him that he might be smitten and die. Joab executed the commission with fidelity and dispatch: Uriah fell; and Bathsheba after a short interval became the wife of David.

Adultery, and murder, are crimes of too heinous a nature to admit of an apology. And, in the present case, even those circumstances which sometimes afford an extenuation of the guilt, are not to be found. In both instances, the crimes were committed, not from the instantaneous impulse of appetite, but with deliberation and contrivance. David enquired after the woman and sent messengers to bring her to his house; and he employed studied artifice to accomplish her husband's death.

How powerfully doth this example of the fatal consequence of licentious passions speak to our hearts this lesson, "Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall?" If once the avenues to the heart are left without the guards of discretion and resolution, and unlawful desires are permitted to riot in the soul, it is impossible to say what extravagancies of folly and madness, of baseness and villainy, may ensue. In

the midst of the confusion of importunate appetites, how shall the “ still small voice” of reason be heard ? When once a man suffers himself to be borne down the stream of impetuous passions, where is the power that shall stop him in his course, and say, “ Hitherto shalt thou go, but no farther ? ” At such a moment, the principles of honour appear idle and visionary, and the obligations of religion are forgotten. Compliances of a doubtful nature prepare the way for others confessedly criminal ; and one crime creates new and powerful motives for committing another. We have then no security against sinking into the lowest depths of vice, but in “ abstaining from the appearance of evil.”

To the guilty mind there is no alternative but repentance, or, condemnation. It was happy for David, and reflects honour upon his memory, that he repented. The manner in which he was brought to repentance deserves particular notice. His faithful servant, the prophet Nathan related to him this beautiful parable. “ There were two men in one city, the one rich, the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds ; but the poor man had noth-

ing, save only one little ewe-lamb, which he had brought and nourished up ; and it grew up together with him, and with his children ; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him." David heard the story with resentment, and threatened to punish the offender ; but, such is the power of self-deception, he was not aware of the intended resemblance, till Nathan made the application by saying — "Thou art the man." Then indeed his heart smote him, and he said unto Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan replied, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die : howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die."

The latter part of this reply suggests an idea of great importance, which is not

perhaps generally attended to. Though David's sin was forgiven, he was not wholly exempted from punishment :--- “ The child that is born unto thee shall surely die.” In this case the punishment was inflicted by the immediate hand of heaven ; but it is equally true in all cases whatever, that vice, even when repented of, cannot pass wholly unpunished. Men seem to apprehend, that if they repent of their sins, and thus escape the final condemnation of the wicked, they are in the same condition as if they had never offended : and to this it is probably to be ascribed, that they persevere in their vices with so much tranquility ; flattering themselves that, by repenting at some distant period, they shall be in the same state with those who have led the most innocent and virtuous lives, with this material advantage, that they shall have enjoyed the pleasures of sin, and at the same time secured to themselves the rewards of virtue. But, let no man suppose, that in the constitution established by unerring wisdom and rectitude, such encouragement can be given to the practice of vice. The truth is, that punishment is of two kinds, positive and natural ; the one depending on

the immediate pleasure of the Supreme Governor, the other resulting from the necessary relations of things and tendencies of actions. From the former the penitent is exempted through the favour of his Maker ; from the latter, nothing but an entire change in the general constitution of nature could release him. He must necessarily suffer the pain attending the consciousness of guilt, and can never review the whole of his past life with the same satisfaction as if it had been uniformly virtuous. He has spent a large portion of his life without experiencing many pleasures, which, had he followed the dictates of reason and religion, he might have enjoyed. At the time of his repentance, he is necessarily, in the moral state of his mind, much below the standard to which he would have attained had he always steadily adhered to the path of virtue. In his bodily constitution, in the dispositions and habits of his mind, and in his external circumstances, he may long continue to experience the unhappy effects of his vices. And lastly, he must unavoidably stand in a lower degree of estimation with the wise and good among his fellow-creatures, and with the Supreme Judge of

merit, than if he had always employed himself in laudable pursuits and virtuous actions. Each of these circumstances may justly be considered as so many distinct punishments of vice, from which even the penitent himself cannot be excused. Let no man, then, defer repentance from an expectation that he shall be on the whole a gainer by his vices; for it is an eternal truth, that "Whatev-  
er a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

We  
attem  
affor  
that  
comi  
circu  
our o  
such  
thoug  
dinary  
which

I

ON THE  
CHARACTER  
OF  
DANIEL.

---

DANIEL VI. 5.

*We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.*

IT is by no means necessary, in order to render a character worthy of our attentive contemplation, and capable of affording us useful moral instruction, that it should have been formed in the common walks of life, and placed in circumstances and situations similar to our own. If the virtues it exhibits be such as it is in our power to practise, though they be displayed in an extraordinary manner, and by a series of actions which lie out of the sphere of the gene-

rality of mankind, they may nevertheless be surveyed with advantage, and may not improperly be held up to our view as patterns for our imitation. For, in actions which we cannot exactly copy, there may be a sublimity and perfection of virtue, the bare contemplation of which will refine and elevate our ideas of moral excellence, warm our hearts with virtuous emotions, and strengthen the principles and habits of goodness in our minds. And uncommon situations and extraordinary actions have this peculiar advantage, that, by their novelty and grandeur, they tend to engage the attention and interest the feelings in a higher degree than is to be expected from the ordinary occurrences of life, and by natural consequence may be supposed to make a deeper and more lasting impression upon the heart.

On these grounds, I shall in this discourse present before you the great lines of a life, which, though peculiarly circumstanced and full of marvellous incidents, is nevertheless worthy of high admiration, and capable of suggesting important lessons of morality.

Daniel, a Jew by birth, and instructed from his earliest years in the principles

of true religion, after Judea had fallen into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, was summoned with several other Jewish youths to the court of Babylon, to fill up the train of the king's servants. In this situation he discovered inflexible integrity, and superior abilities. His great wisdom, and particularly the supernatural power with which he was endued of interpreting dreams, soon attracted the notice of the king ; who receiving that information from Daniel which he had in vain sought for from his own wise men, rewarded him with royal presents, and exalted him to a place of the first distinction in his court.

But Daniel appears to have had a much higher object in view in the exercise of his extraordinary abilities, than merely to obtain wealth and honour for himself, he employed them in the service of religion, and to establish the knowledge and fear of the one true God among a people wholly given to idolatry. This faithful servant of God, in addressing the king of Babylon, labours to inculcate just and exalted ideas of the supreme Deity, and hereby to undermine the foundations of idolatry and false religion. He instructs Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge the one,

true God as the source of all power. “Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength and glory. The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” And the efficacy of his instructions, in conjunction with his wonderful power of interpreting dreams and the great events which followed, is manifest in Nebuchadnezzar’s public declaration of reverence for the Most High: “Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of Gods, and a Lord of Kings. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou? I Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the king of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

How glorious the triumphs of true religion over idolatry, in such a testimony

to the honour of the Lord of heaven and earth, from the lips of a monarch, who not long before had set up a golden image, and required the people to worship it ; and who had said, in the haughtiness of his spirit, “ Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty ? ”

If Daniel discovered great firmness of mind in his steady adherence to religion, and his endeavours to propagate the faith and worship of the true God in an idolatrous court, he was no less determined and courageous in his adherence to the cause of virtue ; boldly venturing, perhaps at the hazard of his life, to admonish his sovereign, and to preach unto him, in plain and faithful language, the doctrine of repentance. “ O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee ; and break of thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.”

When will the servants of princes learn from an example like this, to speak the truth in the ear of majesty, and to change the fawnings of adulation, for the

honest simplicity of wholesome advice and faithful reproof."

The zeal and fidelity of Daniel are still farther displayed in his behaviour to Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Belshazzar, when he was summoned before him to explain the hand-writing upon the wall. This prince, forgetting the punishment which his father's pride and impiety had brought upon him, returned to all the idolatries of his ancestors : and to express his contempt for the God of heaven whom the Jews worshipped, he made use of the sacred vessels belonging to his temple at a public feast. In the midst of the mirth and prophaneness of this festival, a miraculous image on a sudden presented itself before his eyes : "there came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the king's place : and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against the other." Wherefore this alarm ? Why should the king expect, from that heaven-directed hand, words of terror, rather than words of peace ? His conscience suggested the

reafon. On the instant, upbraiding him with his vices, it affixed a meaning to the mysterious characters, which chilled his soul, and unnerved his frame. His knees smote one against another, because his thoughts troubled him. So timorous and cowardly is guilt.

That the king might be relieved from his painful suspense, the wise men were called together to explain the writing : but without success ; till at length Daniel, the servant of the God of heaven, undertook to disclose the important secret. Appearing in the presence of the king, not with the servility of adulation usually practised by those who live upon the smiles of princes, but with an independent and manly spirit, and with dignity becoming his character and the weight of his embassy ; he said, “ Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another : yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.” Then calling to his remembrance the particulars of his father’s disgrace and punishment, he adds ; “ And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven ; and thou

hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know : but the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." After this solemn reproof he declared unto him the signification of the writing, and pronounced the immediate dissolution of his kingdom.

This part of the story of Daniel may teach princes, that when religion is banished from their court, the surest basis of their power and greatness is taken away : It may instruct courtiers, that if impiety should at any time be countenanced by the general practice of the great, or even obtain the royal sanction, it is the part of a good man boldly to ensure the vices even of his superiors, and with determined resolution to employ his influence and example in support of virtue and religion : and lastly, it may suggest a lesson of general use to persons in every rank of life, not to fear the faces of men, but on every proper occasion openly to declare their abhorrence of irreligion and prophaneness.

Civility and politeness degenerate into weak timidity, and betray a criminal indifference to the most important objects,

when they prevent a man from entering his protest against prevailing vices. It is owing to this culpable complaisance, that licentiousness and impiety so often appear with dauntless front in the presence of modest virtue. Would men of real principle and unaffected piety throw off that false delicacy, which often leads them to suppress the honest emotions of their hearts ; instead of caressing and flattering men whom they cannot but despise, would they assert the dignity of virtue by treating the votaries of vice with the contempt which they merit, the licentious tongue would be stopped, guilt would hang down its head abashed, and villainy retire from the public eye, to perpetrate its deeds of darkness in secret. If there be forms of good breeding which screen the impious and the profligate from ignominy ; if in any cases it be thought inconsistent with the laws of politeness to check the follies of licentiousness, or resent the insults which profane-ness offers to the sacred name of religion ; such customs are wholly inconsistent with real order and decorum no less than with religious principles and ought to be renounced with disdain by all who are not willing to sacrifice every generous virtue

and sacred obligation to complaisance. It is a law of religion, which ought never to be forgotten by men and christians ; “ Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him.”

Daniel’s inflexible honesty and faithful services met with a better reward, than such merit often finds in the courts of princes. He was placed in a post of distinction and trust, not only by Belshazzar, but by his conqueror Darius the Mede ; who, for the best reason in the world---because “ he saw that an excellent spirit was in him”---appointed Daniel to be the first of three ministers, whom he chose to superintend the governors of provinces ; and at length formed a design of entrusting him with the sole direction of public affairs.

A favourite, whatever be his real merit, must expect enemies : envy and jealousy, ambition and avarice, will combine their strength to cast him down from his eminence, even though he has been indebted to his virtues alone for his exaltation. Daniel’s colleagues, and the inferior governors, unable to bear the lustre of his superior merit, and impatient to share the honours and rewards which had been so liberally bestowed up-

on this foreigner, determined to watch for an opportunity of bringing him into disgrace with his sovereign. But, so strictly upright and faithful was he in the transaction of public business, so perfectly innocent and irreproachable in his whole behaviour, that even the keen eye of malice could discover no ground of censure or complaint. "They could find none occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him."

Determined, however, at all events to overthrow his rising greatness, when they found it impossible to charge him with any crime, they formed the malicious design of employing his very virtues as instruments of his ruin. Having long observed his steady attachment to the religion of the Jews, and his honest zeal for the honour of his God, they concluded that here, if any where, the weapons of their malice would find him vulnerable. They said one to another, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Accordingly to accomplish their malignant purpose, they proposed to the king that a

and sacred obligation to complaisance. It is a law of religion, which ought never to be forgotten by men and christians; “Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him.”

Daniel’s inflexible honesty and faithful services met with a better reward, than such merit often finds in the courts of princes. He was placed in a post of distinction and trust, not only by Belshazzar, but by his conqueror Darius the Mede; who, for the best reason in the world---because “he saw that an excellent spirit was in him”---appointed Daniel to be the first of three ministers, whom he chose to superintend the governors of provinces; and at length formed a design of entrusting him with the sole direction of public affairs.

A favourite, whatever be his real merit, must expect enemies: envy and jealousy, ambition and avarice, will combine their strength to cast him down from his eminence, even though he has been indebted to his virtues alone for his exaltation. Daniel’s colleagues, and the inferior governors, unable to bear the lustre of his superior merit, and impatient to share the honours and rewards which had been so liberally bestowed up-

on this foreigner, determined to watch for an opportunity of bringing him into disgrace with his sovereign. But, so strictly upright and faithful was he in the transaction of public business, so perfectly innocent and irreproachable in his whole behaviour, that even the keen eye of malice could discover no ground of censure or complaint. “They could find none occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.”

Determined, however, at all events to overthrow his rising greatness, when they found it impossible to charge him with any crime, they formed the malicious design of employing his very virtues as instruments of his ruin. Having long observed his steady attachment to the religion of the Jews, and his honest zeal for the honour of his God, they concluded that here, if any where, the weapons of their malice would find him vulnerable. They said one to another, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” Accordingly to accomplish their malignant purpose, they proposed to the king that a

decree should be passed, “that whoever should ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the king alone, should be cast into the den of lions.” The proposal was too flattering to be refused by an ambitious eastern monarch. Darius, without regarding the impiety, injustice, and cruelty which were implied in the decree, without perceiving the plot which his flatterers had laid against the life of his faithful servant Daniel; signed the writing and the decree.

It had been customary with Daniel, to pay his daily homage to the God of heaven, in an open and public manner in his house. This decree therefore, as his enemies intended, subjected him to the distressing alternative, either to abandon his religious principles, and forsake the God of his fathers, or to suffer a barbarous and shocking death. In this situation, had Daniel regarded the dictates of worldly policy, after the manner of hypocrites in every age making religion the convenient instrument of their ambitious or lucrative views, he would have peaceably acquiesced in the orders of the court, paid the expected homage to his sovereign, and defeated the designs of his enemies. Or had he

listened to the whispers of timidity and cowardice, he would have retired from the public eye, and forming some pretence for not appearing before the king, would have contented himself with worshipping his God in secret.

But Daniel was too sincere and zealous a servant of the Most High God, to be capable of deserting his cause in the hour of danger. To pay divine honours to a mortal like himself, was impious idolatry, which his soul abhorred : to decline the worship of the God of heaven, in the public manner to which he had been accustomed, through fear of threatened punishment, was a cowardly desertion of his religious principles, to which he disdained to submit, and a contemptuous affront to the great object of his devotion, of which he durst not be guilty. Unseduced by the solicitations of interest, and unterrified by the immediate prospect of death, he determined without hesitation to adhere steadfastly to his religious profession. As soon as he knew that the writing was signed. "he went into his house, and his window being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed and

gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime."

To the irreligious and profane an action like this will probably appear so highly ridiculous and absurd, as not to be accounted for without supposing it the effect of insanity. And possibly the prudent men of the world, who are contented with just so much religion as is consistent with every scheme of ambition, avarice, or pleasure, may consider such actions as the extravagancies of virtue, proper to be gazed at with admiration and celebrated with applause, rather than to be set forth as patterns for general imitation. But the true friends of religion will always discern and acknowledge a dignity and sanctity in characters of this kind, which entitle them to the highest veneration; and in similar situations will esteem it their glory to resemble them.

It is confessed, that it is possible for men to be unnecessarily tenacious of trifles in opinion or practice, and even to fall a sacrifice to blind and weak scrupulosity. But, it would be unreasonable indeed to infer from hence, that all zeal is the effect of ignorance, and that every sacrifice to conscience is a proof of weak-

ness of understanding. If religion and virtue are any thing, they are doubtless the most important concerns in the world: when other interests interfere with these, a wise man cannot therefore be at a loss which ought to be preferred; and a good man will not hesitate in his choice. Without a steady determination, whenever our situation shall require it, that we will sacrifice ease, profit, honour, and even life itself to principle, and that we will, secure the approbation of our own minds and the favour of Heaven, whatever they may cost us; all pretensions to a virtuous and religious character are groundless and delusive.

Every man, therefore, ought in the first place to mark out with accuracy the line of duty which belongs to his condition and character; carefully distinguishing such actions as are to him indifferent, and such as are of indispensable obligation; that he may neither, on the one hand, perplex himself with needless scruples, nor, on the other, trifle with things of essential importance. And having done this, he should deliberately form, and habitually maintain, a determined purpose, in every situation uniformly to follow the serious judgment and convic-

tion of his own mind, unmoved by the prospect of present pleasure or gain, or by the fear of temporary inconvenience or suffering.

Nor let any man who is sincere in such resolutions, be apprehensive lest he should on the whole be a loser by his integrity. In the usual course of things, he may assure himself that it will at present be productive of rich and valuable fruits. And, although it be possible, that, notwithstanding the most steady and active virtue, he may be afflicted and oppressed; nay, although, in some cases, even his virtue itself may involve him in difficulties, and subject him to severe and cruel treatment; still, let him not despair of seeing this most important account at last balanced, to his entire satisfaction.

Daniel, the virtuous, the pious Daniel, was cast into the lions' den. It was his virtue which created him enemies; it was his virtue which gave success to their cruel devices against him; but, it was his virtue, too, which saved him from the jaws of the lions. Sitting calm and collected in the midst of devouring beasts, and looking up with grateful joy to the God of his salvation, he said to Darius, " My God hath sent his angel,

and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me ; for as much as before him innocency was found in me, and before thee, O king, have I done no hurt."

And imagine not that, because such extraordinary interpositions of Heaven are not at present to be expected, your virtue is on that account unseen and unprotected, or will go without its reward. Your virtue may possibly, in some cases subject you to ridicule and reproach ; it may keep you out of some of the most promising paths to preferment or wealth : it may deprive you of a large portion of your worldly possessions ; it may expose you to persecution, with all its formidable train of attendants, poverty imprisonment, torture and death. Yet, be not dismayed. The virtuous man has that within, which can sustain him under the severest shock of affliction, render him impenetrable to the sharpest darts of malice, and enable him to "look at threatening death and not turn pale." The virtuous man hath an Almighty Patron, who will not suffer his enemies finally to triumph over him ; a Faithful Guardian, who will protect him in the hour of darkness, guide him through the vale

O

of death, and hereafter " bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day." It is the animating doctrine of christianity, " The sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed. This hope, christians, ye have as an anchor to the soul, sure and stedfast. Be ye therefore patient ; establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

**C H A R A C T E R****S T . P E T E R .****M A T T H E W , X X V I . 3 5 .**

*Peter said unto him, though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

THERE are some characters, which, though perfectly inoffensive, and formed on the most exact rules of prudence, are yet so entirely destitute of enlarged and generous principles, and barren of great and shining actions, that, if they escape our censure, they have no power to command our esteem or captivate our affections. On the other hand, there are characters shaded with many defects, and perhaps stained with many faults, in which, nevertheless, there is such a prevalence of amiable and worthy

qualities, that we are naturally biased in their favour, and feel ourselves inclined to extenuate their errors, and applaud their virtues. How far this judgment will agree with the impartial decisions of reason, it may not be easy to determine. But perhaps there are few persons, unless they be themselves strangers to the genuine emotions of virtue, or have been long accustomed to correct and subdue their feelings by the abstract reasonings of philosophy, who would prefer the man concerning whom nothing better could be said than that his character is free from reproach, to one in whom occasional irregularities and faults are blended with generous purposes, and actions highly deserving of praise.

It is to a character of this kind, that I am in this discourse to solicit your attention. Peter, one of the companions and apostles of our Saviour, seems to have been animated by a warm affection for his master, and zeal for his cause, and yet to have had so little fortitude, or to have suffered false opinions and inferior motives to take such hold upon his mind, as not to have been able to support the character of a disciple of Christ with firmness and constancy, till long expe-

rience, and the wise instructions of his Lord, had enlarged his ideas and settled his principles.

During the whole period in which Peter accompanied his master, he discovered on every occasion the sincerity and ardor of his attachment to him. He listened with attention to his discourses : he was always the foremost to acknowledge him as the Messiah ; he was active in executing his orders, jealous for his honour, and anxious for his safety.

Such proofs of fidelity and affection, would doubtless procure Peter no small share of our Saviour's regard. Sometimes, however, they were expressed in a manner, which discovered that he entertained false ideas of the character of the Messiah and the nature of his mission, and obliged his master to censure and reprove him. When Christ foretold his sufferings and death, "Peter began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord ; this shall not be unto thee ; but he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee from me, mine enemy ; thou art an offence to me ; for thou favourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." Christ probably rebuked Peter thus severely, because he saw, that

his solicitude at this time arose more from the apprehension of being disappointed in his worldly views, than from concern for the sufferings which his master was to endure. This conjecture is confirmed by the anxious enquiry which Peter makes, on another occasion, concerning the recompence which the followers of Christ were to expect. "Behold we have left all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"

From hence it is obvious to remark, that it is of great importance in forming a steady and consistently-virtuous character, that the foundation be laid in rational ideas of things, and just principles of action. Without this, a man will be in continual danger of being led astray by false appearances of interest or duty, and will in many instances imagine himself acting a laudable and meritorious part, when he is in fact doing that which is unjust and criminal. Of this we have innumerable instances in the history of the Christian Church; in which it appears, that a blind zeal for the honour of God, the purity of the christian faith, and the salvation of souls, hath often led men into the violation of the first laws of justice and humanity.

The dangerous influence of false principles, appears in Peter's treatment of a servant of the high priest, at the time when Christ was betrayed into the hands of his enemies. Peter thinking this a proper opportunity of shewing his zeal for his master, drew his sword, and smote off the servant's ear. He probably imagined, as christians in succeeding ages have done, that the cause of Christ required the support of violent measures; and that the excellence of the cause was sufficient to justify any means employed in its defence. But, Christ himself had other views of the nature of his kingdom, and expected his followers to support it by other methods. Conscious that his religion rested on a foundation which no human power could destroy, he forbade his disciples to draw the sword in his cause. "Then said Jesus unto Peter, put up thy sword into its place." Happy had it been for the christian world, if, in obedience to the doctrine of Christ, and in imitation of his spirit, his followers had never employed the arm of the civil power, or the weapons of military force in defence of the christian faith!

It was probably owing to the false conceptions which Peter entertained of

the kingdom of Christ, no less than to the fickleness of his temper, that he was guilty of that shameful act of infidelity and cowardice, which has left an indelible stain upon his character.

When the time of our Saviour's last sufferings and death drew near ; foreseeing that none of his disciples would have resolution sufficient openly to avow their adherence to him in this hour of trial and particularly that Peter would desert him with peculiar circumstances of disgrace ; he said, " All ye shall be offended because of me this night." Peter, from a confident persuasion of the sincerity and stability of his resolution, replied, " Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended—Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee—I will lay down my life for thy sake." To these bold declarations, Jesus, who knew, better than Peter himself, what manner of spirit he was of, answered ; " Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake ? Verily, I say unto thee before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice." And the event agreed with the prediction.

At the first appearance of the enemies of Christ, Peter, remembering his declar-

ations, determined to distinguish himself in the defence of his master, and performed that act of rashness and violence which has already been noticed. But, upon receiving a rebuke for the vehemence of his temper ; whether it was that he was displeased to find that his spirited behaviour was not approved of ---that he had spent his whole stock of fortitude in one single action---or that, when he saw his master voluntarily resigning himself into the hands of his enemies, he despaired of the honours and rewards he had expected and gave up all for lost----whatever was the cause, his spirit immediately began to droop, and he followed his master afar off.

The multitude leading Christ to the palace of the high priest, Peter, desirous to keep himself concealed, and, at the same time, to see the issue, stole into the hall among the crowd. He was, however soon discovered, and one of the servants observing him, said, " This man was also with him." The character of a follower of Christ, was now become too disgraceful and dangerous to be openly acknowledged ; he thought it the wiser and safer way to disavow a relation from which he now expected so little advant-

age ; and accordingly replied, " I know him not." The hesitation and confusion with which this was spoken, probably attracted the notice of the company ; for soon after another repeating the charge, said to him, " Thou art also of them." He had already denied the accusation, and it was now too late to retreat. Disregarding the secret upbraidings of his conscience, he therefore determined to persist, and replied with more confidence than before, " Man, I am not." The charge was now brought against him the third time ; " Surely thou art one of them, for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech bewrayeth thee." Upon this, finding that all his asseverations were not sufficient to gain him credit, but that he was still treated with contempt, as a follower of this despised teacher ; his pride and resentment prompted him again to repeat his false assertions with greater vehemence, and to support them by profane oaths. " He began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak." Thus did Peter, an apostle of Christ, who had given repeated proofs of affectionate and zealous attachment to his master, in the season of trial forsake and deny him.

Where the foundation of a virtuous character is laid in good principles and dispositions, and where the heart is not hardened by settled habits of vice, though it may be in the power of a sudden and violent temptation to seduce a man far astray from the path of virtue, it will not be difficult to make him sensible of his error, and bring him back to his duty. At the instant of Peter's denial of Christ, one look from his master calmed his passions, struck conviction into his soul, and melted him into tears of sorrow and repentance. "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter."

If there is a language in the countenance, this look would certainly speak to the heart of Peter, with an energy of which words are wholly incapable. It would remind him of his foolish presumption ; it would give him the most painful feeling of his irresolution ; it would upbraid him with shameful disingenuity and ingratitude ; it would at the same time express so much pity and tenderness, as would give him the fullest assurance that his master did not mean to cast him off for ever. The united emotions of shame, remorse, and grateful affection instantaneously excited by this

expressive look from Christ, were too powerful to be confined within his breast: he could no longer support the affecting scene---“he went out and wept bitterly.”

Can we review this interesting narrative, without learning a lesson of caution and diffidence? When our moral feelings are lively, and our virtuous purposes strong, we are ready to take it for granted that we shall always have the same perceptions of the importance of right conduct and the same bias in favour of virtue, as at present. We do not sufficiently consider the powerful influence of circumstances and situations upon our feelings. We are not duly aware, that when, on the one hand, pleasure invites us into the paths of licentiousness, or, on the other, danger threatens us with disgrace, poverty, pain, or death, in the path of virtue; our passions then become advocates on the side of vice; and may possibly so far succeed, as to render us inattentive to the most important truths, or to pervert our judgments, and lead us to false opinions and conclusions concerning our duty and interest. Before we can be fully assured that our virtue is such as will stand the shock of every temptation, we must be certain that

the principles, on which it rests are so just and rational, and so firmly established, that they will accompany us with all their commanding influence through every scene of life

It was not till the death and resurrection of Christ had convinced Peter, that all his expectations of an earthly monarchy under the Messiah were chimerical, and fully confirmed his faith in the rewards of immortality, that he became firm and resolute in his adherence to the cause of Christ. It was because he was now fully persuaded, that Christ had the words of eternal life, that he was able to make this pathetic appeal to his Master for the sincerity and zeal of his affection, “ Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee,” and to confirm the truth of this declaration by the whole tenor of his future conduct.

Before the Jewish populace, and a great multitude of strangers who were assembled at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, he boldly testified the truth concerning Jesus Christ ; teaching them that “ he was a man approved of God by miracles and wonders, and by his resurrection from the dead ; and preaching unto them in his name the forgiv-

ness of sins." And when the attention of the multitude was engaged by a miracle which he had performed on a lame man ; after having modestly disclaimed all personal merit in the wonderful effect which had been produced, and ascribed it wholly to the power of God ; he took occasion again to declare unto them the true character of Christ, and the nature and ends of his mission.

The priests and rulers of the people soon perceived that this new doctrine, so industriously spread among the people, and supported by such surprising powers, if not immediately suppressed, would introduce a material change in the state of religion, and might probably issue in nothing less, than the entire subversion of the present public forms and institutions. The ecclesiastics, jealous of their privileges, and fearful lest an innovation in matters of religion, might be attended with the diminution or total loss of the honours and emoluments annexed to their office ; and the civil magistrates apprehensive that public disorder and confusion in the state might arise from the introduction of a new system of religion, and perhaps too imagining it their duty to employ their au-

uthority in maintaining the religion of their fathers ; determined to exert their utmost power in suppressing these bold innovators. "They commanded Peter and John not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus."

In this manner hath priestcraft and bigotry, in all ages, invaded the sacred rights of conscience, and opposed the progress of truth. Even among Christians, who at first suffered so severely from a persecuting spirit, this spirit hath almost universally prevailed. That sect of Christians which hath been so fortunate as to obtain the sanction of the civil power, and by consequence the emoluments of establishment, hath generally treated the rest as heretics, and, in order to preserve the purity of the christian faith, hath made use of violent measures to silence and suppress them. And, although the present age is distinguished by liberality of sentiment and freedom of enquiry, it must still be owned, that there are many restraints on the free investigation of truth, which have the sanction of law, and many others, no less powerful, arising from prejudice and bigotry.

In some instances, that unreserved communication of opinions, which seems

ness of sins." And when the attention of the multitude was engaged by a miracle which he had performed on a lame man ; after having modestly disclaimed all personal merit in the wonderful effect which had been produced, and ascribed it wholly to the power of God ; he took occasion again to declare unto them the true character of Christ, and the nature and ends of his mission.

The priests and rulers of the people soon perceived that this new doctrine, so industriously spread among the people, and supported by such surprising powers, if not immediately suppressed, would introduce a material change in the state of religion, and might probably issue in nothing less, than the entire subversion of the present public forms and institutions. The ecclesiastics, jealous of their privileges, and fearful lest an innovation in matters of religion, might be attended with the diminution or total loss of the honours and emoluments annexed to their office ; and the civil magistrates apprehensive that public disorder and confusion in the state might arise from the introduction of a new system of religion, and perhaps too imagining it their duty to employ their au-

thority in maintaining the religion of their fathers ; determined to exert their utmost power in suppressing these bold innovators. “ They commanded Peter and John not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

In this manner hath priestcraft and bigotry, in all ages, invaded the sacred rights of conscience, and opposed the progress of truth. Even among Christians, who at first suffered so severely from a persecuting spirit, this spirit hath almost universally prevailed. That sect of Christians which hath been so fortunate as to obtain the sanction of the civil power, and by consequence the emoluments of establishment, hath generally treated the rest as heretics, and, in order to preserve the purity of the christian faith, hath made use of violent measures to silence and suppress them. And, although the present age is distinguished by liberality of sentiment and freedom of enquiry, it must still be owned, that there are many restraints on the free investigation of truth, which have the sanction of law, and many others, no less powerful, arising from prejudice and bigotry.

In some instances, that unreserved communication of opinions, which seems

to be the natural means of advancing knowledge, might subject a man to severe penalties ; in others it might bring upon him a heavy load of odium and resentment, for there are not a few pretenders to a liberal spirit, who make their own opinions the utmost boundary of free enquiry, and are no less severe in their censure of those who venture one step beyond their line, than the most rigid supporters of ancient systems.

Such difficulties as these are doubtless great obstructions to the progress of truth. For there are few who have at the same time such a full conviction of the certainty and importance of their opinions, and such a zeal for the interests of religion and the public good, as to be willing to expose themselves to the hardships and sufferings of persecution for the sake of propagating their system of religious faith.

However, if a man be in his own mind fully convinced, that it will be of essential importance to the happiness of mankind, that he should endeavour to support and extend that scheme of religion which he has embraced ; and more especially if he has received an extraordinary commission and authority from Heaven to become a teacher of religious

truths to the world ; in these cases, he ought doubtless to lay aside every inferior consideration of private ease, emolument, or even safety, that he may serve mankind, and fulfil the gracious purposes of Providence.

Of this species of heroism we have a most striking instance in the conduct of the apostles Peter and John, who persevered in preaching the doctrine of Christ in opposition to the express prohibition of the Jewish priests and rulers, justifying their conduct to their governors by saying, “ Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken to you more than unto God, judge ye---We ought to obey God rather than man.”

It is by slow degrees that truth unfolds itself to the human mind. Peter did not become fully acquainted with the unlimited extent of the kingdom of Christ, but imagined that its blessings were to be confined to the Jewish nation, till he was instructed by a vision from heaven, “ that God also to the Gentiles had granted repentance unto life.” The Jews had such an idea of their own sanctity, that they judged it “ an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew, to keep

company with or come unto one of another nation." This prejudice Peter retained, till God shewed him, "that he should not call any man common or unclean." But there is no circumstance in his life which reflects greater honour upon his character, than the readiness with which he gave up these narrow sentiments, and opened his heart to the Gentiles. No sooner did he receive a commission to preach the gospel to Cornelius, than he went to him "without gainsaying," and unfolded to him the truth concerning Christ.

Strange and extravagant as the prejudice of the Jews in favour of their own nation may appear, it cannot be denied that there is much of the same contracted and bigoted spirit among christians. How few are capable of treating those, whose religious principles and profession differ from their own, with the same friendliness and cordiality, as if they were brethren of their own sect! Valuing ourselves perhaps too highly on the purity of our own faith and worship, we proceed by an easy step to despise others. Hastily concluding, that their errors are the effect of culpable inattention, prejudice, or obstinacy, we think them deserving of our censure or contempt.

Whereas we ought to remember, that others have the same right to censure us for not embracing their opinions, as we to censure them for rejecting ours ; that difference in opinion is the necessary effect of different situations and opportunities of information ; that there are essential principles of religion and morality common to all sects, which are a sufficient foundation for a virtuous character ; and that genuine integrity, and active useful virtue, are in fact to be found among men of all persuasions. Finally, we should remember, that wherever real goodness of heart and life is found, with whatever peculiarities of opinion or practice it may be accompanied, it will be acceptable to the great Governour of the world.

“ Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.”

*Be*

**T**

grea  
ed a  
ing a

Gree  
meet  
pract  
refine  
discov  
pectin  
With

ON THE  
CHARACTER  
OF  
ST. PAUL.

---

I CORINTHIANS XI. I.

*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*

THERE is no point of light in which christianity appears with greater advantage, than when it is viewed as improving human nature by refining and elevating the principles of action.

Among the philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome, in whose works we meet with the most valuable lessons of practical wisdom, as well as the utmost refinement of speculation, we cannot but discover material defects and errors respecting the motives and springs of virtue. With some of them, the principal end of

life was to enjoy a kind of indolent tranquillity in retirement and ease; and neither public happiness nor private gratification were to be pursued, farther than was consistent with this tranquil state of mind. With others, the grand object seems to have been, to raise the human mind into an unnatural state of independence on external objects, and to give it a solitary happiness within itself, for which nature never designed it.

Those of them who paid most attention to moral propriety and fitness, and were the greatest admirers of *the beautiful, the graceful, and the honourable* in action, neglected to give a just degree of distinction and consequence to the humane and generous virtues; and appear to have been strangers to that enlarged principle of benevolence, which hath for its object the general good, not of a single country or nation alone, but of the whole human race, and of the universal system of beings.

And though the doctrine of a future state was much attended to by the philosophers as a subject of speculation and dispute, and many of them seem to have reasoned themselves into a persuasion of its truth; it seems, after all, even among these wise men, to have been rather treat-

ed as a theoretical dogma, than as a motive to virtue, and among the vulgar, it was probably still less known and regarded.

It was not till Jesus Christ appeared in the world, that these important principles, benevolence and a regard to a future state, were properly taught and inculcated, and allowed to assume their natural influence over the dispositions and manners of men. The doctrine of universal charity is so fundamental a part of the Christian Institutes, and was so much more particularly and strongly recommended by the Author of our Holy Religion, than by any former instructor of mankind, that it might properly be styled his “new commandment.” And to establish the belief of a future state of final retribution, in which men will be rewarded or punished according to the general tenor of their actions in this life, and to direct men’s attention to this important article of faith as a leading principle of action and motive to virtue, appears evidently to have been the chief design of our Saviour’s mission.

With what success this design was executed---how powerfully the doctrine of Christ, supported by his wonderful works, and enforced by his perfect ex-

ample, operated to produce high degrees of benevolence and virtue, and form distinguished and illustrious characters, sufficiently appears in the life of the apostle Paul. Perhaps disinterested active benevolence, and steady invincible fortitude, were never more perfectly united, and more eminently displayed, in any character---excepting only that divine original, of which this was a copy.

No sooner did Paul obtain a revelation of the truth concerning Christ, and receive a commission from heaven to become a preacher of his religion among the Gentiles, than he employed his zealous and active spirit in support of that cause, which he had before, through ignorance and prejudice, vehemently opposed. The labours, fatigues, and hardships, which necessarily attended the undertaking, did not dishearten or terrify him. He travelled through most of the provinces in Lesser Asia, went to Cyprus and Crete, and several Islands on the borders of Asia ; twice passed over into Greece, and visited Corinth, Athens, Thessalonica, and many other places : every where making converts to christianity, and establishing societies of christians, or churches, in almost every city

and town to which he came. At last preached the gospel at Rome also, and, as some think, travelled so far westward as into Spain.

In these journeys, it is not easy to say which is most to be admired, the success of the cause, or the zeal and activity of the apostle. If the former is a strong proof of the divine power which supported the religion of Christ, the latter no less clearly manifests the benevolence and piety which animated the heart of Paul. That journeys, through so many different countries, undertaken with the design of introducing a new system of religion, must have been attended with great fatigue and hazard, cannot be questioned. And nothing can be more evident, than that the apostle had no prospect of lucrative advantage to counterbalance these difficulties. He amassed no wealth to himself; he levied no contributions upon the churches, except for the relief of their necessitous brethren. He was able to make this appeal to the church at Miletus, with whom he had resided three years, “I have coveted no man’s silver or gold, or apparel, yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that are with

Q

me." To what, then, shall we impute the activity and perseverance with which he executed the duties of his apostolic office, but to the ardour of his zeal to promote the moral and religious interests of mankind? Can we read the history of his travels, and not give full credit to the declaration which he makes concerning his own principles and views; "I seek not mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved?"

Where can more plain and indubitable marks of sincerity be found, than in the glowing expressions of affectionate regard, which abound in the letters written by Paul to his christian brethren, in the different societies which he had established? "We do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying---This also we wish, even your perfection; we give thanks to God always for you, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labonr of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming?—I will very gladly spend and be spent for you."

though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be beloved." Compare this language with the whole tenor of the apostle's life, and then judge, whether it be the artificial and constrained offering of hypocrisy, or the natural overflowing of a warm and generous heart.

With what tenderness of affection does the apostle take his last farewell of his brethren in Miletus! After appealing to them for the fidelity and disinterestedness of his services among them, he tells them as a circumstance in which his own feelings were deeply interested, that this was to be his last interview with them---" And now, behold I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." Then leaving with them his apostolic advice and benediction, "he kneeled down and prayed with them all." The affection was mutual, and the parting expressibly tender---" They all wept sore and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him---orrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more."

From the genuine principles of benevolence, and solely with the design of accomplishing more effectually the great

ends of his office, the apostle conformed to the prejudices, and complied with the weaknesses of his brethren. His favourite maxims were such as these ; that “ those who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak,” and that “ every one should please his neighbour, for his good, to edification.” Accordingly, he constantly avoided, as much as possible, every occasion of offence, and yielded to the opinions and practices of others as far as the principles of religion and the nature of his apostolic character would permit. He did not, indeed, in order to gratify the bigotry of his Jewish brethren, in any instance desert the principles of christian liberty, in which he had instructed the converts from heathenism ; and he was highly displeased with Peter’s timidity, in not daring to acknowledge the Gentile christians in the presence of the Jews. But, where his conformity to the Mosaic ritual would strengthen his influence and increase his usefulness among the Jewish christians, without giving offence to the heathen converts, or laying them under unnecessary restraints, he scrupled not to comply. “ To the Jews,” says he, “ I became as a Jew, that I might gain the

Jews: to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law: to them that are without law, as without law, that I might gain them that are without law: to the weak, became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Not that he violated the sacred obligations of morality, and practised pious frauds, from an apprehension that the importance of the end which he had in view would excuse and sanctify any means which might be employed to accomplish it; but that, with respect to things in themselves indifferent, he thought himself at liberty, at different times and places, to act in a different manner, as prudence might direct. It was on these principles that he circumcised his pupil and companion Timothy; and that at Jerusalem he purified himself in the temple according to the Jewish ceremonial.

These actions were by no means inconsistent with his character as the Apostle of the Gentiles. For, though he always taught the heathen converts that they were free from all obligation to obey the law of Moses, and urged them to

"stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free," it does not appear that he ever attempted the abolition of ceremonial observances among the Jewish christians, or indeed that they in fact ceased among them till the destruction of Jerusalem. Paul circumcised Timothy because he was by descent on the mother's side a Jew ; and he did not require Titus to be circumcised, because he was a gentile.\* He probably foresaw that christianity would in time supersede the Jewish ritual : but, since Jesus Christ had himself conformed to it during his life, and had never expressly declared its abolition, he thought it perfectly consistent with his christian character, that as a Jew he should "walk orderly and keep the law." And in the instance of his purification, he doubtless apprehended such a conformity peculiarly necessary, in order to obviate a prejudice which the Jewish christians had entertained against him, from a false report which had been circulated, "that he had taught the Jews to forsake Moses, and not to circumcise their children, or walk after the customs."

\* Acts xv, 13. Gal. ii, 3.

This part of the character of Paul points out the proper medium, between that rigid and obstinate adherence to our own opinion and humour, which would be inconsistent with the obligations of social life, and obstruct our usefulness in the world, and that mean and timid compliance with the decisions and inclinations of others, which leaves a man no judgment, no principle, no character of his own. In all points in which integrity is evidently and immediately concerned---where we are fully persuaded that we cannot resign ourselves to the direction of others, without sacrificing our innocence and peace of mind---the most resolute inflexibility is the highest virtue; and even to waver and hesitate is to be criminal. In cases of an indifferent nature, where compliance can be attended with no serious inconvenience, either to ourselves or others, singularity may generally be looked upon as indicating conceit and affectation, or moroseness and ill-nature; and compliance as the effect of that desire of pleasing, which is the first ingredient in genuine politeness. But in cases where, by an innocent conformity to the prejudices or customs of those around us, we may so far obtain their

good opinion, as to increase the probability of our succeeding in any attempts to render them important services ; such compliances, proceeding from motives of benevolence, derive no inconsiderable degree of merit from the end to which they are directed.

Concerning some kinds of conformity, it must be evident to every man, that they are immoral and culpable : but, with respect to others, different principles and views may lead one man to look upon that compliance as criminal, which another may think innocent, and even laudable. In all such doubtful cases, while we are careful not to condemn others, merely because their judgment and moral principles lead them to a conduct different from that which we should approve in ourselves, let us follow the honest dictates of our own hearts, without regard to the censures of the world ; remembering, that whatever opinion others may form of our understanding or integrity, if "our own hearts condemn us not, we have confidence towards God."

There is no trait in the character of Paul more striking, or worthy of attention, than the firm resolution with which he persevered in the execution of his of

fice, and the intrepidity with which he encountered the difficulties and dangers that beset him on every side. When, at the instigation of certain soothsayers, who "saw that the hope of their gain was gone," Paul was imprisoned at Philippi, such was the composure and cheerfulness of his mind, that "at midnight he prayed and sung praises unto God." Amidst the commotion raised in Ephesus by those who reaped the harvest of superstition, who, because their craft was in danger, cried aloud against the insult which the teachers of these new doctrines were offering to the great goddess Diana, Paul would have hazarded his life among the crowd, had not his brethren prevented him.

See him brought a prisoner before Felix, a Roman governour---charged with the crimes of sedition and heresy ; his accusation supported by the pleadings of an artful, and probably corrupted orator, the bigoted multitude collected around him, ready to insult him, and triumph in his condemnation---not a friend to attest his innocence, or support his spirit  
—In this situation behold him, sustained by conscious integrity and the goodness of his cause, making his defence

with calmness and fortitude, and challenging his enemies to declare "if they had found any evil-doing in him." In the presence of Agrippa, hear him giving a narrative of the manner of his life, and of the extraordinary event which had converted him to christianity, with such artlessness and sincerity, that Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a christian." Follow him through every scene of danger and suffering; and in the midst of all, see him preserving his tranquillity undisturbed, and his fortitude unshaken; hear him saying, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus."

If you ask, What was the principle which animated the apostle in these conflicts, and raised him above the terrors of persecution? I answer, it was the hope of immortality. It was because "he walked by faith, not by sight," and "rejoiced in the hope of the glory of God," that "neither tribulation, nor distress, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword," could deter him from continuing "stedfast and immoveable in th-

work of the Lord." In the immediate prospect of martyrdom, when he was "ready to be offered, and the time of his departure was at hand," this blessed hope enabled him to say, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day."

Behold, my brethren, in the life of the apostle Paul, the divine energy of christian charity, and christian hope: and let these sacred principles take full possession of your souls, that they may give strength and stability to your virtue, and effectually guard you against every assault of temptation.

Imagine not, that because you do not meet with the same trials with the first christians, you have no need of their principles, to secure your integrity. To be strictly honest and just, amidst a thousand opportunities of increasing our wealth by unlawful means---To be uniformly sober, chaste, and temperate, while we are plentifully supplied with the materials of licentious indulgence---To be generously active in the service of mankind, and ready to every good work,

while our own interest or our own gratification are perpetually soliciting our attention; requires as much strength of mind, and steadiness of principle as to keep the path of duty in the darkest seasons of adversity, or the most stormy days of persecution. In every condition and situation, you will find your best security in the principles of religion and christianity.

It is only genuine benevolence, sincere piety, and a stedfast faith in a future state, which can effectually sustain your virtue through all the trials of the present life, and prepare you for the uninterrupted happiness provided for the righteous in the life to come.

ON THE  
CHARACTER  
OF  
JESUS CHRIST.

---

MATTHEW XI. 29.

*Learn of me.*

THE several distinct characters which the Author of our Holy Religion sustains, require correspondent practical regards from his disciples. Believing in him as a teacher of sacred truth, under the immediate direction and authority of Heaven ; it is their duty to receive his doctrine as the unerring standard of faith. Acknowledging him the messenger of the divine will, appointed by the Almighty to declare unto mankind the eternal laws of virtue and religion ; they are bound to make his precepts the constant rule of their conduct. Remembering the benevolent purposes which he formed for the instruction and refor-

R

tion of mankind, and the labours and sufferings through which he cheerfully passed in the execution of his design ; it is their duty to revere his memory, and contemplate the actions of his life with affectionate gratitude. Lastly, considering his character as perfectly free from blame, and as adorned with every amiable and respectable virtue ; they should carefully observe and imitate his most excellent example.

It is in this latter point of view that we are now to contemplate the great Saviour of the world---as exhibiting before us a pattern in every respect worthy of our imitation.

On this copious and instructive theme, a great variety of interesting particulars offer themselves to our attention. To display our Saviour's wisdom, I might distinctly examine his several discourses recorded by the evangelists, remarking his just and sublime conceptions of the perfections and providence of God, his enlarged ideas concerning the nature of religion, his rational views of the present condition and proper happiness of man, and the purity and extent of his moral system. To shew the strength and efficacy of his religious principles, I might represent him to you as observ-

ing the institutions of Moses, and performing frequent acts of devotion in public and in private, and call you to attend him through the whole course of his public ministry, in which every miracle he performed, every discourse he delivered, every trial he suffered, was an instance of obedience or resignation to the will of his Father. To manifest the extent and ardour of his benevolence, I might lead you to the survey of all his active services for the benefit of mankind, in which he healed all manner of diseases among the people, and employed his divine wisdom and authority in correcting error, and reprobating vice, and in establishing virtue and religion in the world.

But, without attempting a perfect delineation of the character of Christ, I shall, in what follows, endeavour to give you an idea of some of its more striking features, so far as this may be obtained by attending to some of those incidents of our Saviour's life, which are the most fruitful of moral instruction.

Let us, in the first place, direct our attention to the conference which Jesus held with the woman of Samaria.

Our Saviour travelling through Samaria in his way from Judea to Galilee, sat down by the side of a well to repose

and refresh himself, while his disciples went into a neighbouring town to purchase provision. It happened, that a Samaritan woman came at this time to draw water. Jesus, always watchful for an opportunity of doing good, took occasion from the circumstance of the woman's drawing water from the well, to give a figurative account of his own character, which engaged her attention, and prepared the way for a most interesting and instructive discourse on religious worship. The woman being informed by our Saviour of some particulars in her life, with which she knew it must have been impossible for him to be acquainted without supernatural powers, immediately concluded that he was a prophet.

It had long been a subject of warm dispute between the Jews and Samaritans, whether Jerusalem or Mount Gerizzim was the place appointed by Heaven for the performance of the more public and solemn acts of religion. The woman, curious to hear the judgment of a prophet concerning a point so much controverted, and in her apprehension of so much importance; and perhaps too, desirous of receiving instruction from Heaven to direct her own conduct in this particular, said to our Saviour, "Our

fathers worshipped in this mountain ; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." She supposed that this wise man was able to determine the controversy, and probably expected that he would give a decisive opinion, either in favour of the Jews, or the Samaritans ; but, as is generally the case with disputants, had little suspicion, that it was possible for any one to regard the question in dispute as of small importance.

Jesus Christ, however, was too well acquainted with the true nature of religion, to think it essential to the acceptableness of religious worship that it should be presented on any particular spot of ground ; he knew that the institution which he was about to establish in the world was not to be confined to any particular country or nation ; and it was one of his principal objects, to turn men's attention from the outward forms of religion, to the inward sentiments of piety and devotion. He therefore instructed this Samaritan woman, and, in her, all those to whom his doctrine on this head hath been communicated, that the principles and disposition of the mind alone, must determine the value of the homage which we pay to the Supreme Being,

without regard to any external circumstances whatsoever.

"Jefus said unto her, woman believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father---the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; for the Father seeketh such to worship him : God is a spirit ; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."

This explanation of the nature of religion, and the qualifications required in religious worshippers, is so full and explicit, that it might seem scarcely possible for those who profess to make the doctrine of Christ the rule of their faith and practice, to be more attentive to the external modes of devotion, than to the inward spirit of piety. And yet we find this fundamental error prevailing among christians, not only in those dark ages in which superstition might naturally be expected to rise up as the offspring of ignorance, but even in the present enlightened period. Instances are not uncommon, of persons so scrupulously attached to particular places and forms of worship, that they can hardly be persuaded to acknowledge those of a

different persuasion as fellow-christians, and would think it in some sort, a violation of the purity of their religious profession to unite with them in occasional acts of worship. In every sect there are bigots to be found, who, with the true spirit of Jews and Samaritans, because they cannot agree to worship their Maker in the same place or in the same words, choose as much as possible to avoid all intercourse with each other. Whereas, a proper attention to the doctrine of Christ on this head, or to the nature and reason of the thing would have taught them that whatever real or supposed advantage one mode of religion may have above another, the only thing essential to devotion is sincerity ; and that sincerity may be found in every form of religion and among christians of every sect.

Liberality of sentiment, and superiority to national prejudices, were no less apparent in the freedom with which Christ conversed with the woman of Samaria, than in the spirit and tendency of his discourse. A Jew, with all the partialities of his country about him, would have thought it a disgrace, perhaps a crime, to have conversed with a Samaritan. Even those who accompanied Christ on his journey, retained so much of this

without regard to any external circumstances whatsoever.

"Jesus said unto her, woman believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father---the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; for the Father seeketh such to worship him : God is a spirit ; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."

This explanation of the nature of religion, and the qualifications required in religious worshippers, is so full and explicit, that it might seem scarcely possible for those who profess to make the doctrine of Christ the rule of their faith and practice, to be more attentive to the external modes of devotion, than to the inward spirit of piety. And yet we find this fundamental error prevailing among christians, not only in those dark ages in which superstition might naturally be expected to rise up as the offspring of ignorance, but even in the present enlightened period. Instances are not uncommon, of persons so scrupulously attached to particular places and forms of worship, that they can hardly be persuaded to acknowledge those of a

different persuasion as fellow-christians, and would think it in some sort, a violation of the purity of their religious profession to unite with them in occasional acts of worship. In every sect there are bigots to be found, who, with the true spirit of Jews and Samaritans, because they cannot agree to worship their Maker in the same place or in the same words, choose as much as possible to avoid all intercourse with each other. Whereas, a proper attention to the doctrine of Christ on this head, or to the nature and reason of the thing would have taught them that whatever real or supposed advantage one mode of religion may have above another, the only thing essential to devotion is sincerity; and that sincerity may be found in every form of religion and among christians of every sect.

Liberality of sentiment, and superiority to national prejudices, were no less apparent in the freedom with which Christ conversed with the woman of Samaria, than in the spirit and tendency of his discourse. A Jew, with all the partialities of his country about him, would have thought it a disgrace, perhaps a crime, to have conversed with a Samaritan. Even those who accompanied Christ on his journey, retained so much of this

spirit, that, upon their return from the city, "they marvelled that he talked with the woman." But our Saviour's benevolence was not confined within the narrow limits of a religious sect, or civil community. When he saw a fellow creature in need of instruction or relief, he did not defer the offices of charity, till he had satisfied himself concerning his religion or his country. The humanity which he practised was generous and unconfined; like that which he so pathetically recommended to his disciples, in the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan.

Let all who profess to be followers of Christ, "go and do likewise."

It is a circumstance deserving of notice, that this valuable lecture of heavenly wisdom was deduced from a common and apparently-trifling incident. The Samaritan woman came to draw water: our Saviour from hence took occasion to offer unto her religious instruction, under the image of living water. In this manner did Christ, whose "meat was to do the will of him that sent him," seize every opportunity of inculcating some important truth, or conveying some useful sentiment, to the minds of those around him. How much might conversation be improved; how successfully

might the education of children and youth be conducted, if the objects in nature, and the incidents which daily occur, were thus made use of as instruments of instruction !

We should then, to borrow the words of the poet,

Find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.

The same enlarged views and generous spirit, which directed our Saviour's conduct in the scene we have been considering, were displayed on another occasion, when his disciples reproved one who cast out devils because he was not of their company, "Master, says John, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us."

It is in this manner that bigots in all ages have reasoned : on this ground the whole superstructure of religious oppression and intolerance has been erected. Men have first taken it for granted, as the disciples did, that none but those who belong to their own sect can be true friends to religion, or at least, that it is impossible for persons so erroneous in their opinions, to render any real service to its interests : and they have then easily persuaded themselves, that it was ne-

cessary in order to preserve the purity of the christian faith and worship, that they should employ violent means to suppress and silence "those who follow not with them."

But nothing can be more directly opposite to the genius of christianity, or the temper of its benevolent Author, than such practices. He checked the intolerant spirit of John and his brethren, by saying, "Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is on our part;" hereby instructing his followers in future ages, to regard all those who endeavour to promote the design of his religion---the moral improvement of mankind ---- under whatever denomination they rank themselves, as friends to christianity.

It will not be thought surprising, that Christ should embrace every opportunity of discouraging a contracted and bigoted spirit in his disciples, if it be considered that the unhappy effects of this spirit were daily experienced in the disaffection which it had produced between the Jews and the Samaritans. Their alienation was carried to such an height that the common intercourses of civility, and even of hospitality, between the two countries were interrupted. Our Saviour having occasion to travel through a

part of Samaria, in his way to Jerusalem, sent some of his disciples before him into a village to prepare refreshment for him and his company. The inhabitants soon perceived they were Jews, and refused to furnish them with the necessary supplies.

This violation of one of the first rights of humanity might seem to have merited some severe punishment. The disciples James and John thought so ; and proposed to their Master that they should call for fire from heaven, to consume these bigoted and inhospitable villagers. But Jesus, who penetrated deeper into human nature than his companions, and knew the strength of vulgar errors, disapproved of the proposal. He probably saw that the objects of his disciples' resentment were a poor illiterate people, who, implicitly following the judgment of their spiritual guides, had sacrificed their moral principles and feelings to religious prejudices ; and on this account, though he could not entirely exculpate them, he looked upon them rather as objects of pity than indignation. In his disciples' eager proposal of vengeance, he perceived more to censure than applaud : and though he doubtless allowed them all the merit of their zeal and affection for him, he was much displeased to discover

in them, so much of that national enmity which he had endeavoured to subdue, and such a sanguinary and persecuting spirit. He therefore, with a calmness and dignity suitable to his character, “ turned and rebuked them, saying, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.”

If due allowances were made for the unavoidable influence of education and authority, in forming the religious sentiments of men, we should perhaps be more ready to excuse such errors of conduct as are the natural consequence of error in opinion ; at least we should be more sensible of the absurdity of attempting to produce an uniformity of judgment and practice, in matters of religion, by violent and coercive measures. Such measures have been usually ascribed, by those who have adopted them to a laudable zeal for the purity of the gospel, the glory of God, and the salvation of men ; but if the history of persecution be fairly examined, it will, I believe appear, that they have generally been the effect of pride and conceit, a love of dominion, a thirst after gain and a still worse principle, malevolence.

That an erroneous judgment alone, ought not to subject a man to censure and punishment among his fellow-crea-

tures, will perhaps, in the present enlightened age, be generally allowed: but how far our candour and lenity ought to extend with respect to moral irregularities, may admit of dispute. It will be acknowledged, that vice is so disgraceful to human nature, and so injurious to society, that it cannot be too much loaded with odium and contempt. It is undoubtedly a debt which every good man owes to the cause of virtue and to his own reputation, strongly to express his disapprobation of the conduct of those who trample upon the laws of order, and trifle with the obligations of morality. But it seems perfectly consistent with a just indignation against vice, that while we condemn the offence we should pity the offender.

If we reflect, that we ourselves are frail and fallible creatures, that if we have been free from the vices we censure, we have perhaps been chargeable with others less heinous, or however, that we probably owe our innocence, as much to our situation and connections, as to the moral strength of our minds, we shall perhaps see reason to treat those who have been unfortunately seduced into the paths of vice, with greater lenity than they com-

monly meet with from the world. The severity with which the guilty are condemned, is doubtless often the effect of an honest abhorrence of vice, and a superior delicacy of moral feeling. But is there not room to suspect, that it sometimes proceeds from an expectation of being able hereby to purchase, at an easy rate, a character for extraordinary purity and strictness of manners ; or from a design of diverting the attention of the world from our own faults, by directing it to those of others ?

This, at least, seems to have been the case with the Pharisees in the time of our Saviour. And his judgment concerning their conduct in this respect, may be gathered from his apology for the penitent woman, who offered him the most expressive tokens of affectionate gratitude while he was sitting at meat in the house of a Pharisee ; and still more fully from his treatment of the adulteress whom the Scribes and Pharisees brought to him requesting his opinion whether, as the law of Moses prescribed, she should be stoned. His answer to this ensnaring enquiry was, “ He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And while he stooped down, and wrote on the ground, they which heard

it, being convicted by their own consciences, went out one by one ; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lift up himself, and saw none but the woman ; he said unto her Woman, where are these thy accusers ? Hath no man condemned thee ? she said no man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, neither do I condemn thee ; go and sin no more."

It cannot be supposed, with the least appearance of reason, that our Saviour meant by these instances of lenity to give encouragement to vice : his exhortation to the adulstres, " go and sin no more," and the whole tenor of his life, which was " holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, sufficiently refute such a supposition. Thus much, however, may be inferred from these incidents in the life of Christ, that he disapproved of that rigorous treatment of the guilty, which, depriving them of all hope of being ever able to gain the esteem and confidence of mankind, would preclude one of the most powerful motives to repentance, and tempt them in despair to abandon themselves to their vices ; and that, in his estimation, sincere repentance, manifested by a new course of life, as it

is all the atonement which the Almighty expects from his offending creatures, ought to entitle a man to forgiveness, and restore him to favour, among his brethren.

" Be ye, therefore, merciful, even as your Father who is in heaven is merciful."

15 OC 61

---

ON THE  
CHARACTER  
OF  
JESUS CHRIST.

---

JOHN XIII. 15.

*I have given you an example.*

PRIDE and ambition have been the occasion of so much infelicity in private life, and of such dreadful public calamities, that the man who should provide an effectual remedy for these evils, would have the highest claim to the title of the friend and benefactor of mankind. There seems to be only two possible methods by which this end could be accomplished : either by placing all men in such a state of perfect equality, that no opportunities of indulging ambitious views should remain ; or by bringing the minds of men under the influence of such principles and maxims of conduct, as

would lay a constant and powerful restraint upon their desires and pursuits. The design of laying aside all distinctions of rank and precedence, and reducing mankind to a level, by destroying private property, and casting all the riches of individuals into a common stock, how plausible soever it might appear to the theoretical philosopher, is found from experience to chimerical and impracticable. Since, then, it is impossible to remove the external causes of ambition, nothing remains but to attack the principle itself, and endeavour to subdue and destroy it by the power of reason and religion.

It was on this ground, that our Saviour erected his standard against this enemy to the happiness of mankind. By directing the attention of his followers to things of a spiritual nature, and instructing them to esteem perfection in moral attainments as their highest glory, and to regard the rewards of immortality as their ultimate end, he endeavoured to give an elevation to their sentiments and desires, which should render them comparatively indifferent to the objects of worldly ambition. And when he found that the general principles which he inculcated upon his disciples, were not sufficient to

counteract the influence of the false opinions and groundless expectations which they entertained concerning the Messiah's kingdom ; he reproved them with the utmost plainness and fidelity, and in the strongest terms prohibited all contentions for precedence, and recommended the exercise of mutual condescension.

When the mother of James and John, from a foolish ambition of providing places of distinction for her sons under the Messiah, came to him, and respectfully bowing before him, said, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom ;" Jesus replied, "Ye know not what ye ask ;" and said to his disciples, "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister ; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant ;" hereby instructing them, that they ought to consider it as the highest point of distinction to excel in acts of condescension and kindness.

Notwithstanding these exhortations, so much of this ambitious and envious spirit still remained among the disciples of Christ, that he found it necessary to make use of every expedient to suppress it. Hence we find him setting before

them a little child, as a pattern for their imitation, and assuring them, that without the modesty and humility of children, they would be unworthy of a place in his kingdom. And because he knew that example speaks with greater energy than precept, he enforced all his instructions on this head, not only by the general course of his life, but by the condescending act of washing his disciples' feet. At the close of this instructive ceremony, he explained his intention in performing it; and commanded them, in imitation of his example, to exercise humility and condescension towards each other. "Know ye not what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master, and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

How unbecoming are pride and haughtiness, in those who call themselves followers of a Master, whose actions spoke this language, "Learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart." Little regard indeed do they pay to his precepts---little have they imbibed of his spirit---who, while they look up to the superiour ranks

of life with all the fretfulness of envy, overlook, despise, and oppress their inferiors.

If you see a man eagerly grasping at honours which are not fairly within his reach, practising the base artifices of dissimulation to gain the favour of the great, or purchasing rank and consequence at the expense of his integrity ; If you know a man, who, discontented with the station which Providence hath allotted to him, and determined at all events to make a figure in life in order to provide himself with the means of gratifying his vanity and ambition, practises the arts of fraud and knavery in his commercial connections, or extorts without mercy the utmost farthing from his dependants ; who, on the foundation of the property of others, adopts an elegant and expensive manner of living, which neither his fortune nor his reasonable expectations of profit can support :--If you meet with a man, who, while he fawns upon his patrons among the great with despicable servility, is haughty and overbearing in his behaviour to his domestics and dependants, looks down with contempt upon the poor, turns a deaf ear to their complaints, and as if it were pain-

ful to him to be reminded that he belongs to the same species, hastens to drive them from his sight; where you find a man thus devoted to pride, vanity, or ambition, whatever creed he receives, to whatever church he belongs, call him not a christian---for, "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Let us now proceed to survey the closing period of our Saviour's life, in which all his virtues shine forth in one bright constellation---in which every scene at once gives us the most exalted idea of his character, and affords us the most important instruction.

When he perceived the cloud, which the jealousy of the Jewish rulers and priests, and the bigotry of the populace, had long been raising, ready to burst over his head; when he saw that the only recompence he was to expect for all his labours of love, was a violent ignominious death; in what manner did he support the terrifying prospect? Did he brave his fate with the hardness of stoical apathy? or did he pusillanimously shrink under the apprehension of danger, and, despairing of support from Heaven, desert the post of duty in the hour of trial? The natural sensibility and tenderness of

his spirit forbade the former ; the principles of religion and benevolence forbade the latter. He felt all the infelicity of his situation, and from the view of the painful scenes which were before him, " his soul was exceedingly sorrowful :" but he resolutely sustained the pressure of his afflictions, and submitted patiently to a trial from which his duty to his God, and his love to mankind would not suffer him to be excused. " Father, saith he, if it be possible let this cup pass away from me---nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

In this manner let us, my christian brethren, meet all the afflictions which the righteous Disposer of events shall allot unto us : through all the changes of this mortal life, let the language of our hearts always be, " Not our will, but thine, O God, be done."

There cannot be a character more vile and detestable, than that of one, who employs the confidence of friendship, to serve his own base purposes ; who scruples not to sacrifice the reputation, property, or life of his friend, at the call of ambition or avarice. Such was the character of Judas. He had been admitted to the nearest intimacy with Christ, as

one of his twelve select companions and friends : he had enjoyed the benefit of his private instructions, as well as of his public discourses ; he had doubtless received many proofs of kindness from his master, and made many professions of attachment and fidelity to him. Yet, such is the power of avarice in the heart which has once submitted itself to its dominion ---it was impossible even for the doctrine of Christ to make him wise and virtuous, or for his friendship and love to inspire him with the genuine sentiments of gratitude.

While he followed Christ, it was because he was intrusted with the care of the common stock of the disciples, and found means to make the trust advantageous to himself. And when the Jewish priests and rulers offered him a sum of money, to betray Christ into their hands, every consideration of honour, friendship, and humanity instantly vanished, and he consented to become a traitor. Taking with him a sufficient number of attendants, he came to the place to which he knew that Jesus often retired with his disciples ; and having given his attendants notice that the person whom he should kiss was he whom they were to

leize, he came up to Christ, with all the appearance of dutiful and affectionate regard, and addressing him with the usual salutation, "Hail, master, he kissed him."

Such villainous treachery might surely have justified some signal token of resentment; but Christ, who had long foreseen and been prepared for this event, met the insult with calmness; and only expressed his sense of the injury done him by addressing the traitor in words, which, if he had any remains of sensibility, must pierce his soul; "Judas, betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?"

Some of the disciples, thinking this a proper occasion for approving their zeal and fidelity to their master, and apprehending that the violent assault which was made upon him would justify any act of violence on their part, proposed to Christ, that they should make use of the weapons of defence with which they were provided; and Peter, always the first in action, without waiting for his master's authority, drew his sword and wounded one of the high priest's servants. These violent measures Christ wholly disapproved; and having commanded Peter to put up his sword, and healed the servant's wound, he quietly resigned him-

self into the hands of his enemies---saying, with that pious resignation of which he was so perfect a pattern, "The cup which my father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

When a man is in circumstances of danger or distress, in which his own interests might naturally be expected to engage all his attention, it discovers no common degree of benevolence, to be anxious for the safety and happiness of his friends. It therefore deserves particular notice, that at this most interesting period, when death was approaching our Saviour with every circumstance of terror, he discovered the most benevolent attention to the welfare of his disciples. At the instant that he gave himself up into the hands of the officers, he requested them to permit his friends to depart in safety---"If ye seek me, let these go their way." It was from the same benevolent spirit, that he afterwards paid such friendly attention to the behaviour of Peter, and by a look of gentle reproof, recalled him to his duty; and that on his way to the place of crucifixion, observing a multitude of women following him with tears and lamentations, he expressed his concern for the calamities which were coming upon them

and their posterity, by saying, “ Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and your children.”

To a mind possessed of such tender sensibility and generous affections, as that of our Saviour, it must have been no inconsiderable source of distress, that all the kindness which he had shewn to his followers, had not been sufficient to make them resolute and inflexible in their attachment to him : that, though he had rendered them the most essential services, and had always treated them as friends and brethren, one of their number had the inhumanity and treachery to betray him ; that another, who had made the most zealous professions of friendship, disowned his relation to him with oaths and curses : and that, in the hour of danger the whole company forsook him and fled.

Thus deserted by his friends, behold him conducted as a prisoner to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the principal members of the great council of the Sanhedrim were assembled to examine him. In reply to the enquiries which they made concerning the nature of his doctrine, he appealed to those who had attended upon his discourses, as the

proper witnesses, that there had been nothing in them contrary to the order and peace of the state, or subversive of religion and morality. He rightly judged, that such an appeal was more likely to justify him, than any explanation of the nature and design of his undertaking which in his present situation he should be able to give. An officer who stood near, not understanding the grounds of our Saviour's reply, imagined that it implied some contempt of the high priest, and took upon him to resent the supposed affront offered to his master, by smiting Jesus with the palm of his hand. Christ, with that meekness which so eminently distinguished his character, instead of resenting this insult, calmly reasoned with the offender: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; if well, why smitest thou me?"

The judges before whom Christ now stood, were determined if they could find any charge against him which might give their sentence the least appearance of justice, to condemn him. Accordingly they examined several witnesses, who had been summoned for that purpose; but their accusations were so frivolous and contradictory, that they afforded no

legal evidence against him. They therefore postponed the trial to the next day ; when, in a full assembly of the Sanhedrim, the high priest required Jesus to declare upon oath, whether he was indeed the Messiah the Son of God : upon which he boldly replied, “ Thou hast said right ; I am : ” and the question being again put to him by the whole body of the priests and magistrates, he again acknowledged that he claimed this divine character. On this confession, they pronounced him guilty of blasphemy, and worthy of death : after which the inferior officers and attendants insulted him with contemptuous and cruel mockery.

Judea being now a Roman province, the Jewish rulers, who had pronounced the sentence of death upon Jesus, had not authority to execute the sentence which they had passed till it was confirmed by the Roman governour. They therefore sent Jesus to Pontius Pilate the Procurator whom Tiberius had sent into this province, requesting that he would give his sanction to the step which they had taken. Pilate, willing to excuse himself from interfering in an affair of this nature, desired that they would proceed with the criminal according to the

tenor of their own law : but, the Jews, who knew that without the concurrence of the governour they should be liable to be called to account by the Roman Emperor, urged him to examine the merits of the cause, and either annul or confirm their sentence. Accordingly, the trial was renewed : And because the charge of blasphemy was not so likely to be understood, or attended to, by a Roman, they changed their ground, and accused him of treasonable attempts to destroy the present government, and make himself the King of the Jews. Pilate, who discovered through the whole affair a degree of impartiality which reflects honour upon his memory, asked Jesus what occasion he had given for such an accusation. And finding, from the account which he gave of the nature of his kingdom, that he meant nothing unfriendly to the civil establishment, he declared it as his opinion, that Jesus was innocent of the charge brought against him.

His accusers, dissatisfied with this determination, repeated their complaints: in the course of which Pilate, discovering that Jesus was a Galilean, determined to transfer this perplexing business to Herod, the governour of that country. But Her-

od, instead of examining the cause with the attention which its importance deserved, treated it with ridicule; and sent Jesus back to Pilate with marks of contempt and derision. On this, Pilate, again declaring his opinion of Christ's innocence, recommended him as a proper object of that indemnity, which it was usual to grant to one prisoner at the feast of the passover. But the Jewish rulers and priests, determined at all events to carry their point, urged the populace to name Barrabbas, as a more proper person to receive this indulgence. The populace immediately complied, and with their usual impetuosity cried out, "Not this man, but Barrabbas." Pilate, still desirous, if possible, to prevent a resolution which he considered as unjust and malicious, again proposed that Jesus should be chastised and released. Upon this the resentment of the Jews burst forth into violent exclamations, "Crucify him, crucify him."

As his last effort for the release of this innocent sufferer, Pilate so far submitted to the demands of the populace, as to appoint him to be scourged, and, in ridicule of his supposed pretensions to regal power, to be crowned with thorns, and treated with other marks of ludicrous

contempt. Hoping that by this time the rage of the Jews was appeased, he again ventured to speak in his behalf, declaring that he found no fault in him. But the Jewish priests, magistrates, and people, persisted with malignant obstinacy in their demand, that he should be crucified ; and even proceeded so far as to intimate to Pilate, that in releasing the prisoner he would be liable to punishment as an enemy to Cæsar. This last circumstance staggered his resolution, and induced him, contrary to his real sentiments, to acquiesce in their sentence ; not however without declaring his disapprobation of the measure, by saying, “Behold I am innocent of the blood of this just person ; see ye to it.”

Through the whole of this interesting scene, our Saviour discovered a degree of composure and firmness, becoming the innocence and dignity of his character. No bitter invectives against his accusers, no discontented murmurings at the bitter cup appointed him, fell from his lips, “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth : when he was reviled, he reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened

not : but committed himself to him  
that judgeth righteously."

And now, behold the gracious Saviour  
of the world, led as a condemned criminal  
to the place of execution, and by  
" wicked hands crucified and slain." With  
two malefactors, who had been sentenced  
to crucifixion for capital crimes,  
see him suffering the lingering anguish  
of this cruel death. In the midst of his  
tortures, hear the unfeeling populace, and  
even the rulers and priests, deriding and  
insulting him--- " He saved others, himself he  
cannot save ; if thou be the Son of  
God, come down from the cross." In  
this situation, so shocking to every feeling  
of humanity, observe this innocent  
and meritorious sufferer retaining his fortitude,  
and eminently displaying his benevolence and piety. Seeing his mother  
standing with John near the cross, he gave  
her a most tender proof of his affection,  
by committing her with his last breath,  
to the care and protection of his beloved  
disciple. " He saith unto his mother,  
Woman, behold thy son : then saith he  
to the disciple, behold thy mother." To  
one of his fellow sufferers, who had given  
enough evidence of his penitence,  
he promised a place with him in his

heavenly kingdom. Even upon his enemies and persecutors, he cast an eye of mercy ; and considering their ignorance and prejudice as some excuse for their guilt, he offered up a prayer to Heaven on their behalf ; “ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” At last, when he perceived that the powers of life were exhausted by the extreme anguish which he had endured, he derived divine consolations from reflecting, that he had now completely executed the sacred commission with which he had been intrusted, and was entering upon his everlasting recompense ; “ He said, it is finished.” Then, looking up with joyful confidence to the God whom he had faithfully served, he cried out “ Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit ; and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”

Behold, christians, the triumphs of Innocence over Persecution---the rewards which religion bestows on her faithful votaries. And if ye wish, like your Divine Master, to meet death, in whatever forms of terror, it may approach you, with serenity---If ye desire to partake with him in the glories of his resurrection, and the felicities of his everlasting king-

dom ; imbibe his spirit ; imitate his example : in life and death, be faithful to your God, true to your conscience and just and kind to all men. You will then find, that religion will sustain you, at that season when every other source of consolation will fail, and will enable you to resign your departing spirits into the hands of your Maker, with a “ hope full of immortality.”

“ Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right ; for that shall bring a man to peace at the last.”



15 OC 61

